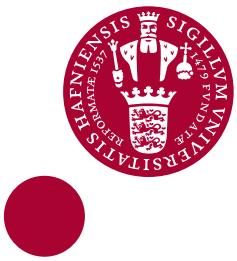

Entangled Citizens, Undesirable Migrants

The Imprint of Empire and Afterlives of Indenture in Indian Diplomacy (1947-1962)

Natarajan, Kalathmika

UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

ENTANGLED CITIZENS, UNDESIRABLE MIGRANTS

THE IMPRINT OF EMPIRE AND AFTERLIVES OF INDENTURE IN INDIAN DIPLOMACY (1947-1962)

PHD THESIS

KALATHMIKA NATARAJAN

Supervisor: Stuart Ward

Date of Submission: 20/03/2019

Name of Department: Department of English, Germanic and Romance Studies

Faculty: Faculty of Humanities, University of Copenhagen

Author: Kalathmika Natarajan

Title: Entangled Citizens, Undesirable Migrants: The Imprint of Empire and Afterlives of Indenture in Indian Diplomacy (1947-1962)

Supervisor: Stuart Ward

Date of submission: 20 March 2019

Number of words: 96,262 words

ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with recovering the figure of the migrant in Indian diplomatic history in the decades after independence. I do so by examining British-Indian diplomatic relations as a negotiation of the limits of citizenship and mobility encountered by 'overseas Indians' and postcolonial Indian migrants – two figures shaped by the histories and afterlives of the indentured labour system, and subject to the provisions of the 1948 British Nationality Act (BNA). The BNA's recognition of Indians as British subjects after independence had significant consequences for both long-settled and prospective migrants, producing Indians resident in British colonies and Commonwealth nations as 'entangled citizens' with multiple, contested claims to citizenship, while also providing prospective migrants with the right freely to enter Britain. Contrary to much of the literature that regards the Indian state's relationship with its diaspora as a binary of exclusion/inclusion where 1947 marked a clean break, I show that the Indian diplomatic engagement with overseas Indians was complex, often paradoxical, yet continual. The status of overseas Indians shaped both India's articulation of 'reciprocity of citizenship' as the basis of its Commonwealth membership, and the making of the 1955 Indian Citizenship Act. Moreover, the Indian state projected its diplomatic stature in terms of its ability to know, mediate and represent overseas Indian communities in British colonial territories. I argue that the Indian state regarded the 'international' as a sanctified space imbued with the afterlives of indenture qua caste, wherein lower caste and class migrants were considered unworthy of holding Indian passports and representing India in the international realm. These 'unskilled' migrants were deemed legatees of the dreaded 'coolie', a dual threat to British public health and India's international reputation. Moving away from the dominant focus on the 'high politics' of conflicts and conferences, this thesis puts the people back into Indian diplomatic history. In so doing, it recognises the history of indenture as a constitutive element in the making of Indian diplomacy and locates the intersection of caste, class and race in Indian diplomatic discourse.

RESUMÉ

I denne afhandling sættes migrantens rolle som en central figur og omdrejningspunkt i indisk diplomatisk historie i centrum. Det gør jeg ved at undersøge britisk-indiske diplomatiske relationer, som gennem forhandling formede begrænsningerne for tilegnelse af statsborgerskab og mobilitet for 'oversøiske indere' og postkoloniale indiske migranter – to kategorier, som på kompliceret vis var omfattet af bestemmelserne i den britiske nationalitetslov fra 1948, og som var formet af det indiske kontraktarbejdes mange historier og efterliv. Den britiske nationalitetslovs anerkendelse af indere som britiske undersåtter efter uafhængigheden i 1947 havde betydelige konsekvenser for migranter, som allerede havde været bosiddende udenfor Indien i en længere periode, samt for fremtidige migranter. Ifølge loven blev indere bosat i britiske koloniale besiddelser og andre lande indenfor Commonwealth regnet for borgere med en kompliceret status qua deres mange og omstridte krav på statsborgerskab. Samtidig gav lovens bestemmelser fremtidige migranter retten til fri indrejse i Storbritannien. I modsætning til meget af den eksisterende forskningslitteratur, som primært kigger på den indiske stats forhold til diasporaen gennem binære eksklusions-/inklusionsmønstre og hvor uafhængigheden i 1947 markerer et klart brud, viser jeg, at det indiske diplomatis omgang med oversøiske indere var mere kompliceret, ofte paradoksal, og vedvarende. De oversøiske inderes status påvirkede nemlig både Indiens betoning af gensidig anerkendelse af statsborgerskab som forudsætning for landets medlemskab af Commonwealth, samt tilblivelsen af loven om indisk statsborgerskab i 1955. Dertil kommer, at den indiske stat byggede sit diplomatis status på en antagelse om, at det skulle kunne indsamle viden om, mediere på vegne af, og repræsentere oversøiske indiske befolkningsgrupper i britiske kolonier. Jeg argumenterer for, at den indiske stats opfattelse af den internationale arena som et ophøjet rum, hvor lavkaste- og underklassemigranter blev anskuet som uværdige besiddere af indisk pas og uværdige repræsentanter for Indien i den internationale verden, var præget af kontraktarbejdets og kastesystemets dybe historiske spor. Disse ufaglærte migranter blev anset som den frygtede kulis arvtager, der på én og samme tid udgjorde en trussel mod den offentlige sundhed i Storbritannien og Indiens internationale omdømme. Afhandlingen udfordrer den fremherskende forskning i indisk diplomatisk historie og dens fokus på højpolitiske konflikter og konferencer ved i stedet at placere individer og mennesker centralt. På den måde anerkender afhandlingen kontraktarbejdets historie som et afgørende element i tilblivelsen af indisk diplomati, og lokaliserer kaste, klasse og race, som et centralt spændingsfelt i indisk diplomatisk tæ.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been completed without the endless enthusiasm, patience and support of my supervisor Stuart Ward. His creativity and attention to detail has been inspiring, and made the daunting process of writing this thesis a lot more rewarding and enjoyable. Most of all, thank you Stuart, and Lill, for your generosity in making me feel so at home in Copenhagen.

I am grateful to the Department of English, Germanic and Romance Studies at the University of Copenhagen for their generous scholarship and financial support. Being part of the Embers of Empire project has significantly influenced the ways in which this project has evolved and I am thankful for the feedback and company of my fellow project (m)embers: Ezequiel Mercau, Astrid Rasch, Christian Damm Pedersen and Harriet Mercer. Special thanks to Christian for translating my abstract to Danish and to Harriet for many illuminating conversations on everything from citizenship legislation to cricket.

Ever since my postgraduate days at Royal Holloway, Yasmin Khan has been a constant source of support and inspiration. I have learnt much from her research and have benefitted greatly from her thoughtful comments about some of the chapters of this thesis. I am also thankful to Sankaran Krishna, whose encouraging reading of my initial ideas about caste and Indian diplomatic history pushed me to think more critically about these themes. His own work on these topics (and much beyond) has been a major influence.

I am amazed by the ways in which conversations with Medha on Indian history, politics and foreign policy – long before either of us began our PhDs – have shaped so much of the form that this thesis has taken. Throughout many joint papers, archival expeditions, conference submissions, and memorable journeys across continents, I could not have asked for better company. Amit Julka's poignant Urdu and Punjabi translations have also helped me understand the migrant experience better.

Early versions of these chapters were presented at a number of invigorating conferences organised as part of the Embers of Empire project and beyond. I am thankful to all the participants for their feedback and expertise. Several nascent ideas were finetuned thanks

to the keen engagement of the participants of the Princeton South Asia conference. My excellent co-panelists at the British International Studies Association conference, Alexander Davis, Medha, Sharinee Jagtiani, and Vipul Dutta, have also helped me think through the politics and silences of the diplomatic archive. Vineet Thakur, Kalyani Ramnath, Cees Heere, and Alexander Davis have kindly shared their fantastic work with me (some of it soon to be published). I am also grateful to Richard Toye for a visiting fellowship at the University of Exeter.

My archival research has depended on the support of the staff at the British Library, Wellcome Library, Wolfson Centre for Archival Research, National Archives at Kew, National Archives of India, and Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. Ms Jyoti at the Nehru Memorial library in particular made access to archival material efficient and easy.

Amba Srinivasan, Preethi Ramamoorthy, Sunitha Sekar, and Janane Venkatraman have made every archival trip back home memorable. I cannot imagine navigating academia without their cheerful optimism, love and support – even bearing with the fact that I was working on my thesis while on holiday with them!

I am ever grateful to my sister Malavika and my parents, Uma and K. S. Natarajan, for their love and countless sacrifices. Thank you, Amma and Appa, for always asking your daughters to reach beyond confines – this thesis would have never otherwise been attempted.

Finally, to Shubranshu Mishra, whose excitement about every archival story I've discovered and every chapter I've written, has kept me going: thank you for everything, and especially for making weary days of writing better with endless cups of *chai*, and a dash of Faiz and Manto.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

'The migrant is, perhaps, the central or defining figure of the twentieth century.'

- Salman Rushdie[1]

In September 1955, Pritam Singh arrived in Britain – gaining free entry as an Indian passport holder and thereby a British subject as per the 1948 British Nationality Act.[2] Traveling from Jodhpur airport to Coventry, where a growing number of Indian 'unskilled immigrants' were settling in, he found employment as a factory worker. Three years later, in January 1958, Singh changed his name by deed poll to Isher Dass Bhagat and applied to register as a citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies (UKC). Singh's quest for a new life – a 'new' name accompanied by a new claim to citizenship – was greeted with grave suspicion by British officials. Questioned by Detective Constable Mellors about his sudden transformation from Singh to Bhagat, he clarified that he had always been called 'Pritam Singh' but had recently decided to honour his late father by adopting his surname 'Bhagat'.[3]

Mellors knew this was a weak explanation, having studied the discrepancies between Bhagat's citizenship application and Singh's Indian passport: although the passport and citizenship form carried his photograph, the names of the father, the details of place and date of birth were entirely different in both documents. Bhagat soon admitted that he had carried a forged passport to enter Britain since the process of getting an Indian passport legally was a 'difficult matter'. Indeed, Bhagat had long been wary of the consequences of using his real name in Britain. As Mellors wrote in his report:

> He was apparently so afraid to use his real name that he used the name Pritam Singh even when writing to his wife in India, and she has written back repeatedly saying that she does not know anyone of that name. This worried the applicant

[1] Salman Rushdie, 'On Gunter Grass,' *Granta 15: The Fall of Saigon,* March 1, 1985 https://granta.com/on-gunter-grass/

[2] As we shall see in great detail in the coming chapters, the BNA provided for British subject status on the basis of 'local citizenship' of a Commonwealth nation.

[3] Letter from N. Mellors to the Undersecretary of State, Home Office, 7.5.58, HO 344/151, 'Police information about organisers of immigration. Replies to a Home Office questionnaire concerning race relations that was sent to police forces across the country', The National Archives at Kew (TNA hereafter)

> so much that eventually he consulted a solicitor as to the best means of re-assuming his proper name.[4]

Bhagat's predicament was not particularly unique: thousands of 'unskilled' Indians had utilised forged passports in the 1950s to bypass emigration restrictions enforced by the Indian government to prevent the mobility of those they deemed unworthy of traversing the international realm.[5] This was further reinforced by the inability of the British government to intervene directly in these passport transgressions: these Indians were, after all, British subjects with the right of free movement to Britain. Indeed as Mellors wrote to the Home Office after interrogating Bhagat, he did not think there was much chance of proceeding against him for an offence that had 'taken place in India before the applicant's departure'. Moreover, he did not think that the possession of a forged passport – which Bhagat had blamed entirely on an unscrupulous agent in Punjab – should necessarily prejudice Bhagat's application for UKC citizenship. By registering for citizenship as Isher Dass Bhagat and not Pritam Singh, Mellors noted that the applicant had, in fact, avoided providing any false information in the form and fulfilled most other qualifications for gaining citizenship.[6]

This extraordinary tale raises several key questions that are germane to this thesis: why was an Indian also a British subject and what were the consequences of such an entangled status? Why did the Indian government restrict the mobility of prospective migrants through the discretionary grant of passports? What was the Indian state's relationship with 'overseas Indians'?

My thesis is concerned with recovering the figure of the migrant in Indian diplomatic history. I do so by examining British-Indian diplomatic relations as a negotiation of the limits of citizenship and mobility encountered by 'overseas Indians' and postcolonial Indian migrants – two figures shaped by the histories and afterlives of the indentured labour system and subject to the provisions of the 1948 British Nationality Act (BNA). The BNA's recognition of Indians as British subjects after independence had significant consequences for both long-settled and prospective migrants, producing Indians resident in the British colonial territories and Commonwealth nations as 'entangled citizens' with

[4] Mellors to the Undersecretary of State, Home Office, 7.5.58, HO 344/151, TNA
[5] The Pakistani government had also similarly imposed restrictions.
[6] Mellors to the Undersecretary of State, Home Office, 7.5.58, HO 344/151, TNA

multiple, contested claims to citizenship, while also providing prospective migrants with the right freely to enter Britain.

Much of the historical literature tends to treat the Indian state's relationship with its diaspora as a binary of exclusion/inclusion, where 1947 is generally thought to mark a clean break with the wider entanglements of empire. In this scheme of things, Independence served to demarcate the limits of Indian citizenship, thereby placing overseas Indians at one remove from the priorities and preoccupations of the new Indian state. Challenging this view, I set out to show that the Indian diplomatic engagement with overseas Indians was complex, often paradoxical, yet clearly persisting into the post-imperial era. Indeed, the status of overseas Indians shaped both India's articulation of 'reciprocity of citizenship' as the basis of its Commonwealth membership, as well as furnishing a crucial context for the making of the 1955 Indian Citizenship Act.

Moreover, the Indian state projected its diplomatic stature in terms of its ability to know, mediate and represent overseas Indian communities in far-flung British colonies. I argue that the Indian state regarded the 'international' as a sanctified space imbued with the afterlives of *indenture qua caste*, wherein lower caste and class migrants were considered unworthy of holding Indian passports and representing India in the international realm. These 'unskilled' migrants were deemed legatees of the 'coolie', a dual threat to British public health and India's international reputation. I therefore read the history of indenture as a constitutive element in the making of Indian diplomacy and a means through which to understand the imprint of Empire. Moving away from the dominant focus on the 'high politics' of conflicts and conferences, this thesis puts the people back into Indian diplomatic history. In so doing, it recognises the history of indentured labour as a constitutive element in the making of Indian diplomacy and locates the intersection of caste, class and race in Indian diplomatic discourse.

OF MIGRANTS AND DIASPORAS

By framing my thesis broadly as an exploration of the Indian state's diplomatic engagement with Indian migrants, I have refrained from using the term 'diaspora' or situating this topic in terms of what Kishan S. Rana has called 'India's diaspora diplomacy.'[7] This does not imply the irrelevance of diaspora studies to my work: indeed, I draw considerably on the vast scholarship about the Indian and South Asian diaspora.

[7] Kishan S. Rana, 'India's Diaspora Diplomacy,' *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 4, no. 3, (2009): 361-372.

Yet, as I seek to demonstrate by way of an overview of the conceptual framework of diaspora in the Indian context, 'diaspora' is a less useful term for the purpose of interrogating the postcolonial state's engagement with the very act of migration and the precarious, 'undesirable' status of a certain kind of migrant – defined through the dynamics of caste and class and imbued with the afterlives of indenture.

Although the term 'diaspora' itself derives from the Greek word for 'dispersion' and has been utilised in the context of the Greek, Armenian, and later African diasporas, it was long anchored to the Jewish experience of exile and the possibility of return to a conceptual homeland.[8] The thriving literature of the 1990s moved decisively from the paradigmatic value ascribed to the Jewish diaspora and instead reimagined diasporas as 'emblems of transnationalism' that could accommodate 'a larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community.'[9] While such a conception has facilitated a tremendous range of applications for the term 'diaspora', well beyond its initial moorings, debates about the exact criterion through which diasporas can be categorised continue. These have been motivated by an overarching attempt to avoid what Brubaker has termed the '"let-a-thousand-diasporas-bloom" approach' that renders the term 'stretched to the point of uselessness.'[10] The utilisation of the diaspora framework in the context of 'Indian' or 'South Asian' migrants has been wide-ranging and often innovative, if nevertheless somewhat unwieldy – evident in the range of terminologies in use from 'Global South Asians' to 'Transnational South Asians', to name just a few.[11]

Some of the most conceptually rich histories of the Indian diaspora draw on the transnationalism imbued in Indian Ocean scholarship. In so doing, this literature challenges simplistic notions of Indian diasporic histories in terms of a 'linear journey (of

[8] See Khachig Tölölyan, 'Rethinking diaspora(s): Stateless power in the transnational moment.' *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 5, no. 1, (1996): 3-36 and Stéphane Dufoix, *Diasporas*, translated by William Rodarmor (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008)

[9] Khachig Tölölyan, 'The nation-state and its others: in lieu of a preface', *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies,* 1, no. 1 (1991), 4.

[10] Rogers Brubaker, 'The 'diaspora' diaspora', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28, no. 1, (2005), 3. See also Tololyan, 'Rethinking diaspora', 10.

[11] See, for example, Judith M. Brown, *Global South Asians: Introducing the Modern Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), Susan Koshy and Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan, eds. *Transnational South Asians: The making of a neo-diaspora* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). Excellent edited volumes include Joya Chatterji and David Washbrook, eds, *Routledge Handbook of the South Asian Diaspora* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), Brij V. Lal, Peter Reeves and Rajesh Rai, eds, *The Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora* (Singapore: Didier Millet, 2006), Gijsbert Oonk, ed, *Global Indian diasporas: Exploring trajectories of migration and theory*. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007),

migration) from source to destination', where diasporic individuals merely replicate the markers of 'Indian culture' in their countries of residence and are seemingly bereft of political identity.[12] Instead, in a number of regions across South East Asia and Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth century, scholars have shown how 'diasporic consciousness' was born out of the linkages and interconnections between what Sana Aiyar terms the 'homeland' and 'hostland'.[13] Thus identities were forged in dialogue with other diasporas, and through the growth of political discourse and anticolonial nationalism in spaces well beyond the territorial confines of British India.[14] While their utilisation of the diaspora framework in their work has been nuanced, these scholars have nevertheless pointed to some of the key limitations of this terminology. Sunil Amrith refers to the popularity of the term itself, making it 'analytically useful if anachronistic … anemic through overuse', while Aiyar calls for a new conception of diasporas that are 'not determined entirely by involuntary exile and the inability to return to the homeland.'[15] Many have questioned both the Indianness of the 'Indian diaspora' and the diaspora-ness of the 'Indian' communities overseas, particularly in earlier historical contexts.[16]

Perhaps most important are the calls to avoid positioning the Indian diaspora as unitary.[17] This is a tension inherent in the literature, most evident in the ways in which histories of indentured labour migrants fit uneasily within the rubric of the 'Indian diaspora.' Indeed, Khal Torabally and Marina Carter's description of their framework of

---

12 Sunil S. Amrith, 'Tamil diasporas across the Bay of Bengal,' *American Historical Review*, 114, no. 3 (2009), 547. This is a vast scholarship, but a few important examples include Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal: The Furies of Nature and the Fortunes of Migrants* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), Amrith, *Migration and Diaspora in Modern Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), Sana Aiyar, 'Anticolonial Homelands across the Indian Ocean: The politics of the Indian diaspora in Kenya, ca. 1930–1950', *American Historical Review,* 116, no. 4 (2011): 987-1013, Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya: The Politics of Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015). Jon Soske, *Internal Frontiers: African Nationalism and the Indian Diaspora in Twentieth-century South Africa.* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2017), Isabel Hofmeyr, 'Universalizing the Indian Ocean,' *PMLA* 125, no. 3 (2010): 721-729, Hofmeyr, 'The complicating sea: the Indian Ocean as method,' *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East,* 32, no. 3 (2012): 584-590, Pamila Gupta, Isabel Hofmeyr, and Michael Naylor Pearson, eds, *Eyes across the Water: Navigating the Indian Ocean* (Pretoria : Unisa Press, 2010)

13 Aiyar, 'Anticolonial Homelands across the Indian Ocean,' 990. Also see Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal* and Soske, *Internal Frontiers.*

14 Amrith, 'Tamil Diasporas,' 572 and Aiyar, 'Anticolonial Homelands'.

15 Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal,* 179 and Aiyar, 'Anticolonial Homelands,' 988.

16 See Oonk, 'Introduction', in *Global Indian diasporas,* 10 and Chatterji and Washbrook, 'Introduction' in *Routledge Handbook of the South Asian Diaspora*, 4.

17 N. Jayaram, 'Heterogeneous Diaspora and Asymmetrical Orientations: India, Indians and the Indian Diaspora,' *Diaspora Studies*, 1, no. 2 (2008), 1-21 See also Bose, *A Hundred Horizons*, 149.

'Coolitude' as an attempt to 'redefine' the Indian diaspora is telling.[18] In a provocative and insightful intervention, Vijay Mishra has articulated the existence of two distinct Indian diasporas divided by time and space: the 'old' diaspora of the indentured labourers who migrated to the colonies and the 'new' migration of 'free' 'skilled' migrants – especially those who migrated to the developed economies of the West. As he notes, the 'homogenization of all Indian diasporas … has led to the fetishization of the new diaspora and an amnesiac disavowal of the old.'[19] In this reading, the ostensibly inclusive accommodation of histories of indenture into the overarching framework of the 'Indian diaspora' is nevertheless also an erasure of sorts. Indeed, this is the tension that underlies Amba Pande's assertion of a 'sense of strangeness' that exemplifies the interactions between the 'old' and 'new' diaspora.[20]

Moreover, it is worth paying attention to the ways in which the Indian state has itself been imbricated in articulating a narrative of a homogenous, united Indian diaspora, while nevertheless still distinguishing between the 'old' and 'new' – indeed when provisions for dual citizenship were first announced in 2003, this was initially extended only to those persons of Indian origin resident in Western, 'developed' countries.[21] Thus the overarching narrative of one united diaspora is a strategic act of states 'appropriating the concept as part of their globalising strategies.'[22] Yet, as Elaine Ho points out, even where scholars 'recognize that the idea of diaspora is appropriated in strategic ways ... and that there may in fact be "varieties of diasporas"… debates are nonetheless anchored on the idea of diaspora.'[23] Indeed, the retrospective rewriting of the distinctive histories

---

[18] Marina Carter and Khal Torabully, *Coolitude*, (London: Anthem Press, 2002), 11. They draw on Stuart Hall's conception of diasporas and hybridity. See Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora' in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, eds, Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, (London: Harvester Whaeatsheaf, 1993), 227-237

[19] Vijay Mishra, 'The diasporic imaginary: Theorizing the Indian diaspora,' *Textual Practice*, 10, no. 3 (1996), 427.

[20] Amba Pande, 'India and its Diaspora in Fiji,' *Diaspora Studies*, 4, no. 2, (2011), 127

[21] Itty Abraham, *How India Became Territorial: Foreign Policy, Diaspora, Geopolitics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 101. Also see Bakirathi Mani and Latha Varadarajan, '"The Largest Gathering of the Global Indian Family": Neoliberalism, Nationalism, and Diaspora at Pravasi Bharatiya Divas,' *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies,* 14, no. 1 (2005): 45-74, Jen Dickinson, 'Decolonising the diaspora: neo-colonial performances of Indian history in East Africa,' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographer,* 37, no. 4 (2012): 609-623 and Jen Dickinson and Adrian J. Bailey. '(Re)membering diaspora: Uneven geographies of Indian dual citizenship,' *Political Geography,* 26, no. 7 (2007): 757-774.

[22] Jen Dickinson and Adrian J. Bailey. '(Re)membering diaspora: Uneven geographies of Indian dual citizenship,' *Political Geography,* 26, no. 7 (2007), 765. See also Himadeep Muppidi, *The Politics of the Global* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004)

[23] Recognising the limitations of the term diaspora, Ho uses the term 'extraterritorial citizenship strategies' instead. See Elaine Lynn-Ee Ho, '"Claiming" the diaspora: Elite mobility, sending state strategies and the spatialities of citizenship,' *Progress in Human Geography,* 35, no. 6 (2011): 760-761.

of Indian migrants into a history of a singular 'Indian diaspora' thus often carries with it a propensity for simplistic, overarching narratives – evident in the almost entirely undisputed narrative of the postcolonial state's exclusion of the diaspora until the era of neoliberalisation, as I will show.

Calls for more nuanced perspectives on the Indian or South Asian diaspora reflect an inherent discomfort in negotiating histories of indentured labour, the outlier within this larger diasporic framework. Drawing on Mishra's categorisation of the old and new diaspora, Amitava Chowdhury has recently argued that the 'uncritical' inclusion of the descendants of indenture into a larger "'global Indian diaspora" … calls for a reassessment of the concept of diaspora.'[24] This is not, he reiterates, a claim against the inclusion of the indentured labour diaspora in the overarching category of the Indian diaspora, but a call for critically interrogating the ways in which this was enabled. In his view, indentured labourers and other members of the diaspora could not be grouped together: 'migration is an essential part of diaspora formation, but that alone does not satisfactorily explain diasporic emergence.'[25] This is a remarkably revealing statement: unlike other members of the 'diaspora' who were automatically eligible for diasporic status, indentured labourers would remain 'migrants' until otherwise indicated. In this reading, the term diaspora is laden with meanings of elite class and caste privilege, unsuited to indentured labour 'migrants' carrying with them the burdens of history. Indeed, in his remarkable history of migration across the Bay of Bengal, Amrith writes: 'now, as in the early twentieth century, working-class Tamil *migrants* are excluded from the clubs, societies, and newspapers that constitute the "*Indian diaspora*" in contemporary Southeast Asia.'[26]

It is this intrinsic tension between the terminologies of 'migrants' and 'diaspora' in Indian discourse – with the former more clearly speaking to the precarious, undesirable, entangled status of those I study – that prompts my preference for the terms 'migrants' and 'overseas Indians' in this thesis.[27] Indeed, in many ways, my thesis is an interrogation of the discomfiting historical status of those deemed 'migrants', who apparently do not

[24] Amitava Chowdhury, 'Narratives of Home: Diaspora Formations among the Indian Indentured Labourers' in *Between Dispersion and Belonging: Global Approaches to Diaspora in Practice*, eds, Donald Harman Akenson and Amitava Chowdhury (Kingston, Ontario: McGill-Queen's Press, 2016), 243.
[25] Chowdhury, 'Narratives of Home,' 244.
[26] Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal,* 268. Italics added.
[27] Given the limitations of the term 'diaspora', I find it more useful to use it in the contemporary context, rather than retrospectively writing it into the histories of migrants.

fit seamlessly into the rubric of 'the diaspora'. While I do not conflate the indentured labourer with the migrant in my analysis, I am interested in tracing the afterlives of indenture in shaping the migration of Indians after independence. This was a discourse shaped by caste, class and race, evident in the longstanding continuities of terms like 'coolie', 'undesirable', 'unskilled', 'pedlar class' – all utilised interchangeably to refer to a certain category of Indian migrants. My focus on the migrant is largely concerned with 'skilled' and 'unskilled' labour migrants, while also drawing significantly on indentured labour migrants.[28] My preference for the term 'overseas Indians' reflects its widespread usage in the period between 1947-1962 that forms the core temporal framework of this thesis – a timeframe bookended by the British Nationality Act of 1948 and UK Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962. These landmark legislative instruments would profoundly shape the citizenship status and freedom of mobility of overseas Indians. Where necessary, however, I also draw on events both before and after this period. The category of 'overseas Indians' was produced out of the 'engagement between the claims of Indian nationalists and the imperial structures of government', framing their status as central to the issue of Indian identity and thus closely entwined in the wider politics of India's diplomatic standing.[29] This thesis is, therefore, concerned with overseas Indians and postcolonial Indian migrants: overlapping categories mapped on to the distinctive realm of Indians in British colonial territories and Commonwealth nations, whose histories indicate the pervasive legacies of Empire negotiated in the making and practice of Indian diplomacy.

INDIAN DIPLOMATIC HISTORY AND THE 'LOST HISTORIES' OF INDENTURE

In contrast to the neglect of migration in much of the contemporary literature on Indian diplomacy, early scholars and practitioners had long been concerned with the status of overseas Indian migrants. Lanka Sundaram, a scholar of international law and later Director of the Indian Institute of International Affairs, published a comprehensive monograph on the status of Indian overseas migrants in 1933, while Dharam Yash Dev, Secretary of the Indian National Congress' Indians Overseas Department, wrote an account titled *Our Countrymen Abroad: a brief survey of the problems of Indians in foreign lands* in

[28] For an excellent delineation of the different kinds of migrants, see Amrith, *Migration and Diaspora in Modern Asia*, 3.

[29] Sunil S. Amrith, 'Indians Overseas? Governing Tamil Migration to Malaya 1870–1941,' *Past and Present,* 208, no. 1 (2010): 243.

1940, featuring a foreword by Jawaharlal Nehru.[30] Others such as P. Kodanda Rao, Sripati Chandrasekhar and C. Kondapi also published widely on a range of topics related to Indian communities settled overseas.[31] This was a subject of keen interest to the nascent nation-state and its diplomatic repertoire: as Sundaram noted in the preface to his book, 'a systematic survey of this type at the present time is a national duty.'[32]

Contemporary scholarship on Indian diplomacy has, however, largely neglected the question of overseas Indians, even in works that otherwise usefully explore the 'prehistory' of Indian foreign policy – an increasing area of focus for scholars challenging the tendency to view Indian diplomacy as beginning on the sacred date of 15 August 1947.[33] This diverse literature has drawn attention to British India's status as a 'sub-imperial' actor with its own 'empire of the Raj' – a status reiterated by the postcolonial Indian state's conscious self-fashioning as the rightful heir to the Raj's legacy and thereby the predominant power of the subcontinent.[34] Narratives of Indian exceptionalism inherent in Indian foreign policy discourses have also been examined in this literature,

---

[30] Lanka Sundaram, *Indians Overseas: A Study in Economic-Sociology* (Madras: GA Natesan & Co., 1933) and Dharam Yash Dev*, Our Countrymen Abroad: a brief survey of the problems of Indians in foreign lands*, (Allahabad: All India Congress Committee, 1940).

[31]. Some of their works include P. Kodanda Rao, 'Indians Overseas', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 233, no. 1 (1944), 200-207, Sripati Chandrasekhar, 'The Emigration and Status of Indians in the British Empire,' *Social Forces*, 24, no. 2, (1945) and C. Kondapi, *Indians Overseas, 1838-1949* (New Delhi: Indian Council of World Affairs, 1951). Kodanda Rao had served as Secretary to India's first Agent in South Africa, Sir V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, and later became the Vice President of the Indian Council for World Affairs.

[32] Sundaram, *Indians Overseas*, v. Also see Lanka Sundaram, 'The International Status of India,' *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs,* 9, no. 4, (1930): 452-466. For more on Sundaram, Rao and the study of International Relations in India, see Vineet Thakur and Alexander E. Davis, 'A Communal Affair over International Affairs: The Arrival of IR in Late Colonial India,' *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 40, no. 4, (2017), 689-705.

[33] Notable examples of this scholarship include Ali Raza, Franziska Roy and Benjamin Zachariah, eds, *The Internationalist Moment: South Asia, Worlds, and World Views, 1917–39* (New Delhi: Sage, 2014), Vineet Thakur, 'Liberal, Liminal and Lost: India's first diplomats and the narrative of foreign policy,' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History,* 45, no. 2 (2017): 232-258. Rahul Sagar, 'Before Midnight: Views on International Relations, 1857-1947' in *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Foreign Policy,* eds, David Malone, C. Raja Mohan and Srinath Raghavan (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015), 65-79. Carolien Stolte and Harald Fischer Tine, 'Imagining Asia in India: Nationalism and Internationalism (ca. 1905–1940),' *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* 54, no. 1, (2012), 65–92, William Kuracina, 'Colonial India and External Affairs: Relating Indian Nationalism to Global Politics,' *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 42(6). 517-532, Stephen Legg, 'An international anomaly? Sovereignty, the League of Nations and India's princely geographies,' *Journal of Historical Geography*, 43, (2014), 96-110

[34] Robert J. Blyth, *The Empire of the Raj: India, Eastern Africa, and the Middle East, 1858- 1947* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) James Onley, 'The Raj Reconsidered: British India's Informal Empire and Spheres of Influence in Asia and Africa,' *Asian Affairs*, 40, no. 1, (2009), 44-62, C. Raja Mohan, 'India as a Security Provider: Reconsidering the Raj Legacy,' ISAS Working Paper No. 146, (2012), Ashwini Tambe and Harald Fischer Tiné, eds, *The limits of British colonial control in South Asia: spaces of disorder in the Indian Ocean region* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008.)

reiterating the ways in which India's self-perception as a 'Leader of the Third World' was shaped not just by its former sub-imperial status, but very much also through a nostalgic rendering of the unique civilizational and expansionist past of 'Greater India.'[35] Yet these attempts to recover the 'past' of Indian foreign policy are not principally concerned with the historical aspects of Indian migration or the processes that produced the colonial Indian state as the arbiter of mobility and migration – a discourse integral to the making of Indian diplomacy, with significant postcolonial continuities.[36]

The widespread neglect of migration in Indian diplomatic history has also facilitated an erasure of the history of the indentured labour system constituted by the colonial state, which transported Indians to far-flung colonial territories including Fiji, Mauritius, British Guiana, Trinidad, to replace slave labour in plantations after abolition. This vast migration, involving the movement of more than a million Indian labourers, is almost entirely absent even in accounts examining the 'foreign policy of colonial India', including those referring to 'overseas Indians'.[37] Recent overarching attempts to theorise Indian foreign policy are also largely silent about this aspect of Indian history – only cursorily mentioning indenture, if at all.[38] This is so despite the existence of a remarkably comprehensive, evocative scholarship about indenture: works intertwining history, poetry and memory, often written by descendants of indentured labourers.[39] These

---

[35] See Priya Chacko, *Indian foreign policy: the politics of postcolonial identity from 1947 to 2004*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).

[36] While there is a growing scholarship on the colonial state's regulation of Indian migration, many accounts of Indian diplomatic history do not sufficiently engage with these works. For an excellent recent history of colonial migration, see Radhika Viyas Mongia, *Indian Migration and Empire: A Colonial Genealogy of the Modern State*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018). Also see Radhika Singha, 'The Great War and a 'Proper' Passport for the Colony: Border-Crossing in British India, c.1882–1922,' *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 50, no. 3 (2013), 289-315.

[37] Sneh Mahajan, *Foreign Policy of Colonial India: 1900–1947* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018) and Vineet Thakur, 'The colonial origins of Indian foreign policymaking,' *Economic and Political Weekly,* 49, no. 32 (2014): 58-64. For details of the numbers of indentured labourers, see Gaiutra Bahadur, *Coolie Woman: The odyssey of indenture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), xx.

[38] Even accounts with a clear historiographical focus do not mention indenture. See Mischa Hansel, Raphaëlle Khan, and Mélissa Levaillant, eds. *Theorizing Indian foreign policy*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), David M. Malone, *Does the elephant dance?: contemporary Indian foreign policy* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[39] A few examples of this vast scholarship include Brij V. Lal, 'Understanding the Indian indenture experience,' *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 21, no. s1 (1998): 215-237, Lal, *Chalo Jahaji: On a journey through indenture in Fiji*. (ANU E Press, 2012), Lal, 'The Odyssey of indenture: fragmentation and reconstitution in the Indian diaspora,' *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 5, no. 2 (1996): 167-188, Surendra Bhana, ed. *Essays on indentured Indians in Natal*. (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 1990). Bahadur, *Coolie Woman,* David Dabydeen, Maria del Pilar Kaladeen and Tina K. Ramnarine, eds*, We Mark Your Memory: writings from the descendants of indenture,* (London: School of Advanced Study University of London, 2018), Vijay Mishra, *The literature of the Indian diaspora: theorizing the diasporic imaginary*. (London and New York:

scholars have been at pains to point out the widespread neglect of such histories: indeed, Gaiutra Bahadur articulates her recent work on indentured women as an attempt to recover 'a lost history within a lost history.'[40] The Indo-Fijian academic Brij V. Lal wrote in a 1983 article that an emerging scholarship on indenture was beginning to ensure that the topic would no longer be 'treated as a stepchild of either British colonial or modern Indian historiography.'[41] However, this cannot be said of most contemporary histories of Indian diplomacy and international relations.

Indenture produced distinct vocabularies exemplifying this unique experience: the labourers referred to themselves as *girmitiyas*, a derivative of the English word 'agreement', referring to the contracts of indenture that formed the basis of their migration. They were also *jahajis*, 'shipmates' – an exceptionally close bond shared by those undertaking the voyage across the perilous dark waters, the *kaala paani,* to reach new destinations: what Lal evocatively terms the 'brotherhood (or sisterhood) of the crossing'.[42] These terminologies were in stark contrast to the sting of the word used to refer to these indentured labourers – *coolie.* Likely derived from the Tamil word for 'wages' but used as a racial slur dehumanising the indentured labourers, the term has a painful history and legacy. While descendants have sought to reclaim the term through prose and poetry, often explicitly titled 'Coolie Odyssey', 'Coolie Woman', even constituting a remarkable poetics of 'Coolitude' by drawing on the voyage of these labourers to 'revoice' the coolie, debate over its usage still continues.[43]

I therefore use 'coolie' advisedly, with the purpose of interrogating the ways in which upper caste Indian elites read the term through meanings of caste – understanding its racial properties very much through the intersections of caste and class. Such elites viewed the term 'coolie' as synonymous with the lowest caste and class Indians exemplified by indentured labourers, a shameful categorisation within which they were loath to be included. Indeed, the backlash against the usage of the term came not only

---

Routledge, 2007). Ashutosh Kumar, *Coolies of the Empire: Indentured Indians in the Sugar Colonies, 1830-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017)

[40] See Max Bearak, 'A Conversation With: Author Gaiutra Bahadur,' *The New York Times*, November 21, 2013. https://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/11/21/a-conversation-with-author-gaiutra-bahadur/

[41] Brij V. Lal. 'Indian indenture historiography: A note on problems, sources and methods,' *Pacific Studies* 6, no. 2 (1983): 33-50.

[42] Brij V. Lal, *Intersections: history, memory, discipline* (ANU E Press, 2012), 161

[43] David Dabydeen, *Coolie Odyssey* (London: Hansib, 1988), Bahadur, *Coolie Woman* and Carter and Torabully, *Coolitude,* 214. Scholars have cautioned against 'a growing trend among some historians to employ this term (coolie) casually without reference to the longstanding arguments against it.' See Dabydeeen, del Pilar Kaladeen and Ramnarine, eds*, We Mark Your Memory*, xii.

from the racist connotations of the term itself, but also (indeed more so) from the fact that it was additionally used to refer to upper caste and class non-indentured Indians in these colonies.[44] These coolies were widely regarded as tarnishing India's reputation abroad, a narrative central to defining the postcolonial Indian state's perception of the international realm as one imbued with the afterlives of indenture and understood through markers of caste and class.

Scholars of indentured labour have done important work in emphasising the agency and diverse caste backgrounds of these labourers, and the heterogeneity of the experience itself – the contexts and histories varying considerably from colony to colony.[45] Yet the reductive colonial representation of coolies had considerable postcolonial continuities, shaping the ways in which 'similar' migrants were deemed unworthy of travelling abroad, especially to hallowed Western spaces. Indeed, 'unskilled' postcolonial Indian migrants who did manage to reach Britain were perceived through the vocabularies of indenture. A 1958 police report surveying 'coloured' Indian immigrants like Isher Dass Bhagat – who we encountered in the beginning of this chapter – noted that these men were 'of the coolie class … i.e. from villages.'[46]

The figure of the coolie has long occupied a liminal space, 'both to define and to obscure the boundary between enslavement and freedom, and to normalize both.'[47] As Nalini Mohabir has argued, this intermediate status has often perpetuated an invisibility for histories of indenture.[48] Even when histories of the diaspora engage with the experience of indenture, this is often treated as a distinct event from the past unrelated to the transformations and identities of the contemporary diaspora. As Lily Cho convincingly argues:

> Clearly, indenture, even in its multiplicity, is not responsible for all Asian Migration. And yet, we have to learn from black diaspora studies in order to understand how indenture produces constitutive effects ... The old diasporas of indenture and bondage cannot be separated from the new diasporas of the

[44] Kumar, *Coolies of the Empire*, 205.

[45] Lal, *Intersections*, 151-152. Lal, 'Understanding the Indian indenture experience,' 215-237. Crispin Bates, 'Some Thoughts on the Representation and Misrepresentation of the Colonial South Asian Labour Diaspora,' *South Asian Studies*, 33, no. 1, (2017), 7-22. The term 'coolie' was also used to refer to Chinese labourers.

[46] Report by F. W. Burgan, 27.4.58, HO 344/151, TNA.

[47] Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 25.

[48] Nalini Mohabir, 'Picturing an Afterlife of Indenture,' *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 21, no. 2 (53), (2017): 81-93.

> transnational elite ... They are constitutive of each other and we risk shoring up a colonialism that never ended when we lose sight of these constitutive effects of indenture on Asian diasporic subjectivity.[49]

Where the transition from 'old diaspora' to 'new diaspora' has been taken to imply the migration of skilled, elite Indians to the West, I situate instead the figure of the 'unskilled', prospective migrant seeking to travel to Britain – a figure carrying the baggage of colonial history and the burdens of coolie status. That is, as Goffe has argued, 'these Asian Diasporic workers, represent the afterlife of the "coolie" experience, the afterlife of "indenture."[50] These afterlives of indenture are also the afterlives of Empire, and yet remain an aspect deemed largely peripheral to other overarching imperial histories.[51] Indeed historians of indenture speak of their consciousness about the ways in which their histories and scholarship are regarded as marginal in academia and beyond. Brij Lal, whose pioneering work has opened up transnational avenues for the study of indenture, has frequently called on 'sub-continental Indians … to re-define their attitude to the overseas Indians. They are not children of some lesser gods, culturally deficient and deformed, who inhabit the remote, unlovely fringes of Indian culture and civilization."[52]

Even where scholars of Indian diplomatic history have paid attention to the existence of indenture in South Africa, thanks to the overwhelming influence of Gandhi, their focus rarely extends to the 'sugar colonies' of indenture – a neglect that stems from larger misconceptions. The historian Goolam Vahed's experience of academic conferences about the Indian diaspora is telling:

> I was struck by the differences in attitude towards India and Indian academics between Indian South Africans and many of those from other former colonies who believe that Indians from India look down upon them as having low-caste indentured origins and as people who have lost their 'authentic' culture, caste and religious practices.[53]

---

[49] Lily Cho, 'The turn to diaspora,' *Topia: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies,* 17 (2007), 25.

[50] Tao Leigh Goffe, 'Intimate Occupations: The Afterlife of the "Coolie",' *Transforming Anthropology,* 22, no. 1 (2014), 60

[51] For a fascinating overview of the conceptual provenance of the 'afterlives' of Empire, see Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012)

[52] Lal, *Intersections*, 155.

[53] Goolam Vahed, 'Brij V. Lal: Rooting for History' in *Bearing Witness: Essays in Honour of Brij V. Lal*, eds, Doug Munro and Jack Corbett, (ANU Press, 2017), 70.

Given such widespread narratives, it is perhaps unsurprising that studies concerned with Indian diplomatic history – a field so wedded to the idea of 'great powers' and power politics – deem the stories of migrants in 'tertiary' countries like Fiji, Guyana, Mauritius as too insignificant to matter.

DIASPORA, DIPLOMACY, AND THE UNDERLYING FRAMEWORK OF THE BNA

Scholars of International Relations and foreign policy have only recently begun to explore the 'unfamiliar peoples' and 'unfamiliar sites' of indenture as a means of understanding its impact on international politics. Randolph Persaud has focused on the sugar plantations in British Guiana as a means of tracing the 'racio-gendered' violence constitutive of the indentured labour system, while Alexander Davis locates the debate over the possible introduction of Indian indentured labourers in northern Australia as a discourse of othering through which Australian identity was reiterated.[54] Yet it is the recent work of Itty Abraham and Latha Varadarajan – both of whom draw on the history of indentured labour – that breaks significant ground by critically examining the Indian diaspora through the lens of Indian diplomacy and foreign policy.[55] Throughout this thesis, I engage with their innovative scholarship while departing from their framing and consideration of Indian diplomacy vis-à-vis the diaspora in important ways.

The most widely accepted narrative of the Indian state and the diaspora, one that Abraham and Varadarajan articulate to a significant extent, unfolds in three stages.[56] First, the movement of Indian indentured labourers and other migrants under the auspices of the British Raj and the importance of overseas Indians to the anticolonial struggle. Second, the territorialising Indian state's decision to 'exclude' and 'turn its back on' the diaspora at the 'moment of independence', denying them any protections or citizenship and instead calling on them to identify with their countries of residence. This was a task made easier by the fact that this diaspora largely comprised lower caste and

---

[54] 'Randolph B. Persaud, 'Colonial Violence: Race and Gender on the Sugar Plantations of British Guiana' in *Race and Racism in International relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line,* eds, Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda and Robbie Shilliam. (London and New York: Routledge, 2014) and Alexander E. Davis, 'Rethinking Australia's International Past: Identity, Foreign Policy and India in the Australian Colonial Imagination'. *The Flinders Journal of History and Politics*, 29.

[55] Itty Abraham, *How India Became Territorial* and Latha Varadarajan, *The Domestic Abroad: Diasporas in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[56] See Marie Lall's work for an example of this stark narrative. Marie-Carine Lall, *India's Missed Opportunity* (Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2001) and 'Mother India's Forgotten Children' in *International Migration and Sending Countries: Perceptions, Policies and Transnational Relations*, ed, Eva Ostergaard-Nielsen, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 121-139.

class indentured labourers who were far from normative Indian citizens. Third, the rapprochement of sorts from the 1990s onwards spurred by the 'neoliberal restructuring' of the state and the economic successes of the Indian diaspora that now comprised 'skilled' upper caste and class migrants – embodiments of the ideal Indian citizen eligible to be granted a form of dual citizenship.

While such a reading is perceptive in bringing to the fore the intersections of caste and class, its analysis of the postcolonial state's engagement with this diaspora is deeply reductive. For Abraham, 1947 is the moment that creates a diaspora: 'what was once a globally dispersed nation … (became) formally differentiated into citizens of the territorial Indian state and an "overseas" diaspora with little claim on the protections of the Indian state.'[57] Such an understanding of the diaspora as a singular, homogenous, hermeneutically sealed category cut off from the state at the dawn of independence ignores the extent to which the status of overseas Indian migrants was integral to postcolonial diplomacy.

First, the utilisation of 'diaspora' as an umbrella term ignores the specificity of the experiences of Indian migrants, a majority of whom were resident across British colonial territories and Commonwealth nations – thereby subject to the provisions of the 1948 British Nationality Act. Second, the binary of the state's inclusion/exclusion of the diaspora facilitates an erasure of the Indian state's *complex yet continual engagement* with Indian migrants. Third, the experience of indenture was not forgotten at the moment of independence: indeed it had a lasting impact on Indian diplomacy and its very conceptualisation of the international realm. Finally, the tendency to point to moments of crises in the 1970s as an indicator of the Indian state's exclusion of its diaspora – India's response to the expulsion of Ugandan Asians being the go-to example – ignores the state's longstanding engagement with the often precarious citizenship status of overseas Indians in British colonial territories that in many ways portended such a crisis.[58] Contrary to established narratives, I argue that there was anything *but* a clean break between the state and its overseas populations in 1947: indeed the Indian state's relationship with Indian migrants after independence was complex, entangled, often paradoxical, yet *continual.*

[57] Abraham, *How India Became Territorial,* 74.

[58] Both Abraham and Lall use the Uganda example. See Abraham, *How India Became Territorial,* 75-76 and Lall, 'Mother India's Forgotten Children,' 122.

The histories and afterlives of Empire and indenture united the 'overseas Indians' and newer 'unskilled' migrants. Yet in a more direct, legal sense, it was the British Nationality Act of 1948 that brought these two categories of Indian migrants, past and present, within one domain by delineating Indians as British subjects after Indian independence. That is, the BNA and the restructuring of the Commonwealth were the legal and political mechanisms mapped over the colonial realm of indenture, where a vast majority of overseas Indians were present. In some ways this intertwined India's relationship vis-a-vis overseas Indians and its diplomatic relations with Britain. For instance, the provisions of the BNA had to be negotiated by the Indian government in the making of its own citizenship legislation, shaping the entangled citizenship status of overseas Indians resident in British colonies. The BNA also enabled Indians, as British subjects, to enter Britain freely – a migration of mutually 'undesirable', 'unskilled' Indians of lower caste and lower class origins that both the Indian and British governments sought to curtail. The entanglements of the BNA and the possibilities of the Commonwealth have often been neglected in accounts of the Indian diaspora and diplomacy that ignore the longstanding impact of the experience of indenture and the particularities of the 'British world' that shaped citizenship and mobility.[59]

While scholars of British nationality legislation and immigration policies have dealt with the BNA in considerable detail, they are less concerned with the ways in which this played out in the Indian context.[60] Moreover, the literature on British-Indian diplomatic relations largely ignores the significance of this legislation, focusing instead on the high politics of Britain's economic and strategic role in the South Asian 'periphery' during the Cold War.[61] A fascinating range of literature has traced the diverse histories and contours

[59] Important exceptions include Sarah Ansari, 'Subjects or Citizens? India, Pakistan and the 1948 British Nationality Act,' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 41, no. 2 (2013): 285–312, Deborah Sutton, 'Imagined sovereignty and the Indian subject: Partition and politics beyond the nation, 1948–1960,' *Contemporary South Asia*, 19, no. 4 (2011): 409-425 and Joya Chatterji, 'From Imperial Subjects to National Citizens: South Asians and the International Migration Regime since 1947' in *Routledge Handbook of the South Asian diaspora,* eds, Joya Chatterji and David Washbrook (New York: Routledge, 2013), 183-197. I engage with these works in detail in the forthcoming chapters.

[60] See, for instance, Rieko Karatani, *Defining British Citizenship: Empire, Commonwealth and Modern Britain* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003), Jatinder Mann, (2012) 'The evolution of Commonwealth citizenship, 1945–1948 in Canada, Britain and Australia,' *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 50, no. 3 (2012): 293-313 and Randall Hansen, 'The politics of citizenship in 1940s Britain: the British Nationality Act,' *Twentieth Century British History*, 10, no. 1 (1999): 67-95.

[61] Some examples include Anita Inder Singh, *The Limits of British Influence: South Asia and the Anglo-American Relationship 1947-56*, (New York: St. Martin's, 1993), Paul M. McGarr, *The Cold War in South Asia: Britain, the United States and the Indian Subcontinent, 1945-1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), Rakesh Ankit, 'Britain and Kashmir, 1948:"The Arena of the UN"', *Diplomacy & Statecraft,* 24, no. 2 (2013): 273-290.

of colonial Indian migration to the 'metropole'.[62] In the context of post-independence migration however, with the exception of Alison Blunt's work on the Anglo-Indian community, the significance of the BNA is not a widely discussed topic.[63] While sociological accounts of Indian immigration mention the BNA, they largely neglect its broader historical and diplomatic significance.[64] This elision is all the more surprising given the important secondary material provided by the magisterial scholarship of Hugh Tinker whose work addresses a range of themes related to overseas Indians. The very trajectory of Tinker's scholarship – from a famous account of Indian indentured labour to the status of Indians in the British Commonwealth until 1950 – hints at the important interconnections in histories of Indian migrants before and after independence.[65] Indeed, the journeys of those like Isher Dass Bhagat who sought to migrate after 1947 were indelibly shaped by the legacies of those who had migrated long before, and the particular geographies that they traversed.

TOWARDS A CRITICAL READING OF THE 'INTERNATIONAL'

Histories of Indian diplomacy and foreign policy have long viewed their remit as limited to the high politics of conflicts and conferences that seemingly take place in a bounded, abstract 'international' space populated by 'rational' diplomatic actors. A range of critical, postcolonial approaches have sought to unsettle such prevalent assumptions: most importantly, by going beyond binaries of the domestic/foreign to show their intertwined status.[66] As Sankaran Krishna has argued in a compelling intervention, it is more useful

---

[62] A few notable examples include Martin A. Wainwright, *The Better Class' of Indians: Social Rank, Imperial Identity, and South Asians in Britain*, 1858–1914. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), Antoinette Burton, *At the heart of the Empire: Indians and the colonial encounter in late-Victorian Britain*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), Rehana Ahmed and Sumita Mukherjee, eds, *South Asian Resistances in Britain, 1858-1947* (Continuum, 2012), Sumita Mukherjee, *Indian Suffragettes: Female Identities and Transnational Networks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) and Rozina Visram, *Ayahs, lascars, and princes : Indians in Britain, 1700-1947* (London: Pluto Press, 1986).

[63] Alison Blunt, *Domicile and Diaspora: Anglo-Indian women and the spatial politics of home* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

[64] See for instance Rashmi Desai, *Indian Immigrants in Britain*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), Dilip Hiro, *Black British, White British* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1971), Roger Ballard, ed, *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain*, (London: Hurst & Co, 1994).

[65] Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830-1920*, (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), *Separate and Unequal: India and Indians in the British Commonwealth, 1920-1950*, (London: C. Hurst & Co, 1976), *The Ordeal of Love: C. F. Andrews and India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979). For a profile of Tinker, see Peter Lyon, 'Tinker, Hugh Russell (1921–2000), historian.' Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (2008) http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-74069.

[66] See, for instance, Sankaran Krishna, *Postcolonial Insecurities: India, Sri Lanka, and the Question of Nationhood* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), Abraham, *How India Became Territorial,* David Campbell,

to view the 'discourse of Indian foreign policy as an important and constitutive moment in the emergence of India itself.'[67] Such a reading also enables a more considered view of the often casual usage of the term 'international.' Itty Abraham regards the 'international' as a 'site of struggle', a zone of 'attraction and anxiety' wherein the promise of decolonization and political freedom came with the opportunity to participate in and shape 'the international.'[68] Drawing on these perspectives, I argue that 'the international' was a space produced by the history of Indian migration – imbued with the legacies of indenture and the entanglements of Empire. This was a space marked by the crises of citizenship and discrimination encountered by overseas Indians, a space where the state sought to renegotiate the 'shame' of the coolie by preventing the entry of new 'unskilled' migrants. The afterlives of indenture are evident not only in the perpetuation of the 'inequalities of humanity based on labor categories labeled unskilled/skilled', but also in its spectral presence in shaping Indian ideas of the international realm as one marked by criterion of caste and class.[69] That is, I read Indian diplomacy as imbued with the afterlives and vocabularies of *indenture qua caste.*

The notion of the indentured labourer as belonging to the lowest castes and classes of Indian society was a pervasive narrative in elite Indian discourse both before and after independence. This is evident in their reading of the term 'coolie' through the intersections of race, caste and class. Gandhi's interpretation exemplifies such a narrative:

> We have become the untouchables of south Africa … The word coolie … means what a pariah or untouchable means to us. [70]

Indeed, Charles Freer Andrews and William Pearson, influential supporters of the Indian nationalist cause, noted in their report of the conditions of Indian indentured labourers in Fiji:

> We were startled every now and then to find in the coolie 'lines' a young lad of high caste and education, whose whole appearance showed that he had no

---

Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), R. B. J. Walker, *Inside/outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993),

67 Krishna, *Postcolonial Insecurities*, 4.

68 Abraham, *How India Became Territorial,* 4.

69 Mohabir, 'Picturing an Afterlife of Indenture,' 87.

70 Mohandas K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or the Story of my Experiments with Truth*, (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1926), 350

> business at all in such a place. The condition of such lads, when they arrive and have to be lodged in the same quarter with men of low morals and unclean habits of life, is pitiable indeed.[71]

Thus a Brahmin indentured labourer seemed an oxymoron to Andrews and Pearson, in contrast to the norm of the lower caste and class indentured labourer – the reference to questionable morals and 'unclean' habits further reiterating the ominous markers of casteism. Such discourse had significant continuities in the Indian diplomatic discourse on the 'unhygienic', 'unsanitary' 'unskilled' Indian migrants in Britain. Euphemisms of caste as hygiene defining Indian 'unskilled' migrants thus very much revealed the lingering effects of indenture. Indeed, the recurrent tropes about migrants in elite Indian discourse make clear the salience of *indenture qua caste* – where distinctions between 'free' and coolie Indians, skilled and unskilled Indians, were, ultimately, means of transcoding Brahmin and untouchable Indians.

Thus, where Abraham has perceptively noted that 'diaspora is foreign policy as a caste-class boundary', I argue that the postcolonial Indian state's regulation of the *very act of migration* produces the international as a sanctified space imbued with the markers of caste and class.[72] Through its control of passports, the state would actively seek to construct its 'diaspora' by not permitting the undesirable Indian citizen to emigrate: embarrassing lower class and caste Indians were deemed best contained within the territorial limits of India. The grant of passports was therefore a mechanism through which the imperative of upholding India's international reputation and status filtered down to the individual passport-holder and potential migrant. Such a conception of the international reiterates the mutually-constitutive nature of the domestic and the foreign: lower caste and class Indians on the margins of Indian citizenship at home would not be permitted to trespass on the international**.** Moreover, framing 'the international' as a space shaped by the journeys of migrants, serves to put the people back into the study of Indian diplomatic history.

Peopling the international also facilitates an emphasis on the performance of everyday diplomacy and a focus on diplomats themselves – not as abstract, generic, rational actors but as 'emotion-capable actors' who serve as anthropomorphic embodiments of the

---

71 C. F. Andrews and W. W. Pearson, *Report on Indentured Labour in Fiji: An Independent Enquiry* (Calcutta: Star Printing Works, 1916), 9.

72 Abraham, *How India Became Territorial,* 78.

state.[73] Elite, Western-educated, upper caste and class diplomats were therefore the most ideal citizens, best suited to represent India – in stark contrast to the 'unskilled' Indian migrant they were called on to engage with and teach 'how to live' in Britain.[74] The performing body of the elite Indian diplomat was thus central to the task of redefining Indian identity in the international realm, writing out the lasting damage caused by narratives of the coolie.

This is evident from the example of Sir V. S. Srinivasa Sastri's term as India's first Agent in South Africa from 1927 to 1929. Famously known as the 'Empire's Silver-Tongued Orator', Sastri 'lectured extensively on Indian philosophy and literature' during his tenure.[75] This was a performance of Indian identity that marked him as the rightful heir to the ancient glories of Indian civilisation and thereby served to counteract the perception of Indianness as synonymous with the coolie. The propagation of these civilizational histories was a central part of Sastri's diplomatic oeuvre: indeed Gandhi termed these lectures 'his greatest and most permanent contribution to the Indian cause in South Africa.'[76] Even a contemporary academic like Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie concurs, arguing that 'Sastri weaved magic … with his brilliant speeches on Indian culture and civilisation, hoping to convert whites to a better understanding of the Indians in their minds.'[77] Thus Sastri's role as one of India's earliest diplomatic representatives was not just about 'protecting' labourers and other Indian communities in South Africa. Representing an Anglicised, elite Indian identity that was in stark contrast to the identity of the coolie, Sastri was performing his role of diplomat-as-exemplar-of-Indianness. The almost entirely upper caste and class profile of the Indian diplomats appointed by the postcolonial state would also similarly reiterate a normative Indian identity, vastly different from that of the 'unskilled', 'undesirable' Indian immigrants they were engaging with.

While much of the recent literature on everyday diplomacy highlights the need to recognise the diplomatic practices of non-elites who do not represent a state, it is also

---

[73] See Iver B. Neumann, 'The body of the diplomat,' *European Journal of International Relations* 14, no. 4 (2008): 671-695. See also Naoko Shimazu, 'Diplomacy as theatre: staging the Bandung Conference of 1955,' *Modern Asian Studies,* 48, no. 1 (2014): 225-252.

[74] Y. D. Gundevia, *Outside the Archives* (Hyderabad: Sangam Books, 2012 online edition), Chapter 8, Kindle.

[75] See Thakur, 'Liberal, Liminal and Lost', 243 and P. Kodanda Rao. *The Right Honourable V. S. Srinivasa Sastri: A Political Biography* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1963), 252.

[76] Rao, *The Right Honourable V. S. Srinivasa Sastri*, 251.

[77] Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie, 'The place of India in South African history: academic scholarship, past, present and future,' *South African Historical Journal*, 57, no. 1 (2007), 27.

useful to re-examine assumptions of how and where 'official' forms of everyday diplomatic work is performed. Iver Neumann has usefully described diplomacy as 'everyday activity that has been an aspect of social life', drawing attention to the 'sited' nature of diplomacy.[78] This is a subject that has received considerable attention from political geographers who have examined the sites where diplomacy takes place, emphasizing the performative aspect of conferences – be it Bandung or Commonwealth conferences – as 'geopolitical events.'[79] While these critical perspectives are no doubt helpful, their focus on international conferences only reiterates familiar sites of diplomatic performance. Yet, Indian diplomatic engagement with migrants necessitated performing Indianness in unlikely international sites. Locating everyday Indian diplomatic engagement in the immigrant localities of Birmingham, an 'out of place' and intimate site away from the usual metropoles of London and New Delhi, enables me to trace the euphemisms of caste and class that shaped the ways in which the Indian migrant was held up as a dual threat to British public health and India's diplomatic stature in equal measure.[80] The performance of everyday diplomacy by High Commission officials in such 'out of place' sites – called on to act 'in loco parentis' (as one observer termed it) vis-à-vis new Indian immigrants in Britain – considerably challenges binaries of the Indian state's inclusion/exclusion of a unitary diaspora.[81]

My exploration of Indian migration as central to the making of postcolonial diplomacy differs from the ways in which studies in other national contexts have conceptualised 'migration diplomacy.' In a fascinating study of US-China relations in the Cold War, Meredith Oyen examines this bilateral relationship in terms of the states' utilisation of 'migration policy for diplomatic ends.'[82] Most recently, scholars have attempted to formulate a theoretical framework of 'migration diplomacy' in the field of International Relations, viewing this as 'states' use of diplomatic tools, processes, and procedures to manage cross-border population mobility.'[83] While such perspectives employ realist,

---

[78] Iver Neumann, *Diplomatic Sites: A Critical Enquiry* (New York : Columbia University Press, 2013), 21.

[79] See Merje Kuus '"To Understand the Place": Geographical Knowledge and Diplomatic Practice,' *The Professional Geographer,* 68, no. 4 (2016), 546-553, Ruth Craggs, 'Postcolonial geographies, decolonization and the performance of geopolitics at Commonwealth Conferences,' *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 35, no. 1 (2014), 39–55, Ruth Craggs, 'Hospitality in geopolitics and the making of Commonwealth international relations,' *Geoforum*, 52 (2014), 90-100, Shimazu, 'Diplomacy as theatre'.

[80] See Neumann, *Diplomatic Sites*, 23-24.

[81] Desai, *Indian Immigrants in Britain*, 76

[82] Meredith Oyen, *The Diplomacy of Migration: Transnational Lives and the Making of U.S.-Chinese Relations in the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015)

[83] Fiona B. Adamson and Gerasimos Tsourapas. 'Migration diplomacy in world politics,' *International Studies Perspectives* (2018), 1-16.

instrumental approaches to trace the strategic purposes of 'migration diplomacy', my framing of the issue is considerably different in viewing the diplomatic history of Indian migration, so to speak, as a postcolonial negotiation of the entangled claims to citizenship and mobility encountered by overseas Indians and prospective Indian migrants. This did not, of course, mean that there was no strategic value to mediating migration or engaging with overseas Indians – indeed, the Indian state sought to utilize the presence of Indian communities in British colonial territories as its locus standi in calling for the development of an Indian diplomatic infrastructure of sorts in these areas. Yet the overarching emphasis in calling for the citizenship rights of overseas Indians while preventing any further emigration of 'unskilled', 'undesirable' Indians can be better understood through the limits of performing postcolonial diplomacy in an international realm imbued with the afterlives of indenture and shaped by notions of caste and class. In so doing, I situate this thesis within a growing critical scholarship that goes beyond realpolitik driven accounts to instead consider the ways in which Indian diplomacy is produced by the experience of the colonial encounter and is replete with markers of race, caste and class.[84]

METHODOLOGY

Finding the space to tell my 'archive stories' after the long process of writing this thesis – journeying into both conventional and unlikely archives – is gratifying.[85] My archival trail was shaped by the overarching question: how does one locate the migrant in the archive of Indian diplomacy? A significant portion of my archival research was first carried out in the well-established sources for Indian diplomatic history: the National Archives of India and the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in New Delhi, and the National Archives at Kew and British Library in London.

While pertinent files on Indian immigration are easily available in the British archives, this is far from the case in the notoriously labyrinthine National Archives of India. Scholars who have traversed the NAI are familiar with the dread of the N.T. (Not Transferred) slip: a device utilised to inform researchers that a file explicitly listed as

[84] Some examples include Alexander E. Davis, *India and the Anglosphere: Race, Identity and Hierarchy in International Relations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), Vineet Thakur, *Jan Smuts and the Indian Question* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu Natal Press, 2017), Sankaran Krishna, 'A Postcolonial Racial/Spatial Order: Gandhi, Ambedkar and the Construction of the International,' in *Race and Racism in International Relations*, eds, Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda and Robbie Shilliam (London and New York: Routledge, 2015)

[85] Antoinette Burton, ed, *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006)

available in the catalogue has not been transferred – usually misplaced – *after* it has been requisitioned. As Alexander Davis has pointed out, the dysfunctional setup of these archives and the lack of access to archival material has often resulted in the privileging of 'the sources of the 'North' over the 'South', the colonizer over the colonized.'[86] With persistence, however, I have managed to access valuable material from the NAI especially pertaining to the making of the 1955 Indian Citizenship Act and the functioning of the passport system.

In considerable contrast to the NAI, the sprawling grounds and excellent facilities of the Nehru memorial museum and library provide easy access to the private papers of some of the Indian High Commissioners in London – B. G. Kher, M. C. Chagla and Vijayalakshmi Pandit. The notably missing name here is, of course, Krishna Menon whose private papers were closed for almost the entirety of my research, although I have been given to understand exactly two weeks before submission that these papers are finally available for the perusal of researchers. I have nevertheless been able to utilise a significant number of Menon's letters to other bureaucrats and politicians available in their private papers, most notably to Jawaharlal Nehru, to bridge these gaps. While Nehru's prolific correspondence has been well-documented, I have also been able to consult his post-1947 private papers made available to researchers since 2016.

My interest in tracing the Indian 'unskilled' migrant and in so doing, critically interrogating the euphemisms of caste and afterlives of indenture in diplomatic discourse has also necessitated accessing the 'unlikely' diplomatic archive. Histories of Indian diplomacy have often tended to render categories of caste, class, race, religion and gender invisible in their discourse, delineating them instead as 'domestic' issues seemingly unrelated to the international ambit of foreign policy. Thus if caste is relegated to the social and domestic realm, where does one trace caste in the archive of Indian diplomacy? I am acutely aware of my own privileged subjectivity as an upper caste researcher based in Western academia with easy access to archives of the metropole that instrumentally shape my research. Indeed, Dalit scholars have emphasized the need to draw on the 'unique strengths of district and provincial repositories in contrast to

[86] Alexander E. Davis, 'An Archival Turn for International Relations: Interrogating India's Diplomatic History from the Postcolonial Archive', 2. Paper presented at ISA Global South Caucus, Singapore, January 2015.

imperial archives based in the metropolitan centers of Delhi and London.'[87]

I have found it useful in this regard to trace the euphemisms of caste in the diplomatic correspondence and memoirs of Indian diplomats, vocabularies evident in discussions of a certain type of Indian immigrant abroad viewed as likely to shame the Indian state: a combination of caste and class that rendered them as 'not the best type', 'dirty', 'unclean' and 'undesirable'. The archive of everyday diplomacy thus offers a space to recover discourses of caste as hygiene where the Indian immigrant is frequently a source of elite, upper caste embarrassment.

In attempting to locate the stories of migrants in Indian diplomacy, I have drawn on the inspiring work of Jordanna Bailkin who 'humanizes' the history of decolonization by shifting the archive from the usual suspects of the Home Office, Colonial Office, Foreign Office, to instead reveal the ways in which Empire was 'cloaked in the avalanche of paper that accompanied the welfare state.'[88] Examining the everyday diplomacy of the High Commission officials engaging with 'unsanitary' Indian immigrants, often couched in vocabularies of 'public health', led me to some important if unlikely archives for Indian diplomacy: the Wellcome library of medical history in London and the Wolfson Centre for Archival Research at the Library of Birmingham. My initial discomfort (borne of unfamiliarity) in utilising these unlikely archives only served to reiterate the importance of decentering the conventional archive of Indian diplomacy in order to write a more critically engaged history.

Exploring Indian diplomatic engagement in Birmingham, a city receiving a significant influx of the Indian immigrant population, I have highlighted the diplomatic relevance of an 'out of place' site beyond the metropoles of London and New Delhi. I have thus sought to go beyond diplomatic memoirs by also including the memoirs of other actors mediating the journeys of Indian migrants – for instance, the remarkable account of Ishwar Das Pawar, a Scheduled Caste passport officer who was one of the very few to grant passports to applicants who belonged to the most marginalised castes, and the memoir of Dr Dhani Prem, an Indian immigrant and political activist in Birmingham.[89] Critical perspectives on Indian diplomacy and foreign policy would therefore benefit not

[87] Ramnarayan S. Rawat, 'Colonial Archive versus Colonial Sociology: Writing Dalit History,' in *Dalit Studies*, eds, Ramnarayan S. Rawat and K. Satyanarayana (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 55
[88] Bailkin, *Afterlife of Empire*, 15.
[89] Ishwar Das Pawar, *My Struggle in Life* (New York: Page Publishing, 2015), Dhani R. Prem, *The Parliamentary Leper: A History of Colour Prejudice in Britain* (Aligarh: Metric Publications, 1965),

only from challenging the overemphasis on Nehru and his readily-available archive by utilising the histories of the 'little-known and lost diplomats'[90], but also by 'humanising' it with the stories of non-diplomats and migrants.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This thesis examines the centrality of the migrant to Indian diplomacy, focusing on the production of 'entangled citizens' and 'undesirable migrants' – figures shaped by the histories and afterlives of indenture and reiterated by the provisions of the 1948 British Nationality Act. Identifying Indians as British subjects, the BNA intertwined the mobility of postcolonial Indian migrants to Britain with the histories and status of overseas Indians long resident in the 'British world'. At the famed stroke of the midnight hour that marked India's independence, the nascent Indian state was faced with the crises of citizenship encountered by overseas Indians across British colonies and Commonwealth nations. Contrary to the widespread assumption that the Indian state made a clean break with the diaspora at the moment of independence, Chapters 1 and 2 emphasise the ongoing if often messy engagement between the Indian state and overseas Indians in negotiating identities shaped by Empire. In so doing, these chapters interrogate the legislation of the 1948 British Nationality Act, India's eventual membership of the Commonwealth in 1949, and the making of the 1955 Indian citizenship act, as processes mutually shaping one another and reiterating the significance of overseas Indians to Indian diplomacy.

The Indian state often viewed the dismal status of overseas Indians as a commentary on India's place in the international system. How could a nascent postcolonial state navigate an international order designed to perpetuate these hierarchies of unequal citizenship and sovereignty? Chapter 1 titled *The Quest for Reciprocity* examines the ways in which India articulated 'reciprocity' as a conceptual framework through which to utilise its newly-sovereign status and position within the 'Commonwealth family' to ensure the 'un-foreignness' of overseas Indians. 'Reciprocity' was a strikingly persistent term underpinning India's demands at imperial conferences for the fair treatment of Indians across the Empire, and had significant postcolonial resonance in shaping India's call for 'reciprocity of citizenship' as the basis of its Commonwealth membership. Where Manu Bhagavan has pointed to India's involvement in the making of the Universal Declaration

[90] Alexander E. Davis & Vineet Thakur, 'Walking the Thin Line: India's Anti-Racist Diplomatic Practice in South Africa, Canada, and Australia, 1946–55,' *The International History Review,* 38, no. 5, (2016), 882

of Human Rights as a means of ensuring the fundamental rights of 'external populations' that it had distanced itself from, I show that the framework of 'reciprocity' within the Commonwealth served as a leverage to more directly engage with the status of overseas Indians and ensure their rights.[91]

Chapter 2, titled *Entangled Citizens,* delves into the diplomatic haze about the exact provisions of the BNA and its applicability to Indians, factors that produced what I term 'entangled citizens': overseas Indians who were potentially eligible for multiple claims to citizenship and yet whose claims were often contested by all countries involved. While a significant literature has focused on the making of Indian citizenship legislation in the context of Partition, I show that the 'eternal' making of the 1955 Indian Citizenship Act was due to the difficulties of reconciling the provisions of the British Nationality Act pertaining to overseas Indians with the fundamental premises of the new Indian legislation. Focusing on the seemingly paradoxical insistence of the Indian state that overseas Indians identify with their countries of residence while nevertheless providing them with provisions for citizenship by registration, I show that these actions are best understood as a process through which Indian diplomacy continually sought to ensure that its overseas communities had citizenship rights – not necessarily *Indian* citizenship.

Chapter 3, titled *Performing Postcolonial Diplomacy*, examines the Indian state's quest for diplomatic representation in British colonial territories, articulated in terms of their ability to know, mediate and represent overseas Indian communities in these regions. Representing these Indians as poor, illiterate communities in grave need of Indian expertise, Indian diplomatic discourse was shaped by the afterlives of indenture. Even as the British government agreed to the appointment of Indian Commissioners, these Indian diplomats were asked to follow an unprecedented set of instructions to demarcate their jurisdiction over Indians in these regions. Navigating these highly restrictive conditions, Indian diplomats were attuned to the limits and realities of performing postcolonial diplomacy – skilfully drawing on the rhetoric of the 'Commonwealth family' to bring up the causes of overseas Indians to otherwise reluctant British officials. This chapter also places British-Indian diplomatic deliberations beyond the metropoles of London and New Delhi, viewing them from the vantage point of colonial territories shaped by histories of indenture.

[91] Manu Bhagavan, 'A New Hope: India, the United Nations and the Making of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,' *Modern Asian Studies*, 44, no. 2 (2010): 311-347.

These three chapters together articulate a reading of the Indian state's relationship with overseas Indians that is not limited to the exclusion/inclusion of the diaspora, but pays more attention to the complex realities and limits of such an engagement shaped by Empire. Indeed well after the purported exclusion of its overseas communities, the Indian state was providing them provisions for citizenship by registration, seeking Commonwealth membership on terms of reciprocity of citizenship, and indeed seeking diplomatic representation in colonial regions by drawing on the presence and status of overseas Indians. Chapters 4 and 5 shift from the focus on long-resident overseas Indian communities to explore the Indian state's regulation of postcolonial migrants – often in coordination with British officials in the case of those migrating to Britain, given their status as British subjects as per the BNA.

Chapter 4, titled *The Privilege of the Indian Passport,* examines the remarkable 20-year period of discretionary grant of Indian passports aimed at preventing the mobility of lower caste, lower class, 'unskilled' migrants deemed unworthy of journeying into the international realm as representatives of India. While a vast literature has shown the racialised limits to mobility perpetuated by the passport and visa system, this chapter considers the Indian state's own restrictions on a particular category of citizens regarded as reminders of the 'shame' of the coolie. In so doing, I show that Indian diplomacy and its ideas of the international were intimately shaped by the intersections of caste and class.

Chapter 5, titled *The 'Unskilled' Immigrant* examines the everyday diplomacy of Indian High Commission officials in Birmingham, a city receiving an increasing number of Indian 'unskilled' immigrants who were declared a threat to public health. Examining the euphemisms of caste and class embedded in narratives of hygiene, I show that the ability of 'unskilled' Indians to assimilate into British society was viewed as a larger discourse on the Indian capability for modernity.

After all, these migrants were not just travellers, but representatives of India overseas: as Jawaharlal Nehru had pointed out, 'wherever in this wide world there goes an Indian, there also goes a bit of India with him … By his actions India will be judged.'[92] These

[92] Article written by Nehru titled "To fellow countrymen in Malaya' 4 June 1937, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (SWJN hereafter), Vol. 8 (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1976)

were journeys where the 'self-respect' and *'izzat'* (honour) of India was at stake and therefore could only be undertaken by those possessing the right 'bit of India' in them, so to speak.[93] Indeed, Nehru's vision of the 'international' had long been inescapably intertwined with the figure of the migrant:

> You … may be largely acquainted with the Indian 'coolie' as he is called with some contempt. It is true perhaps because India herself has sunk to the coolie ranks among nations, and perhaps that contempt is justified, but remember that if India has gone down, she has also the vitality to rise again.[94]

That was in 1937. Ten years later, as the following chapters set out to show, such narratives continued to influence India's attempts to 'rise again' as a diplomatic actor – a process shaped by the presence and status of overseas Indians and imbued with the legacies of indenture and Empire.

[93] See Thakur, 'Liberal, Liminal and Lost', 248

[94] Nehru's address to Indians in Singapore , 26 May 1937, *SWJN, Vol 8*.

1

THE QUEST FOR 'RECIPROCITY'

INDIAN DIPLOMACY AND THE STATUS OF OVERSEAS INDIANS

> Will you please send me information on immigration to Western countries and the way an Indian citizen can gain citizenship of a Western country? I want to offer myself as an immigrant.[1]

This enquiry from C.B Purohit of Jodhpur in 1953 was typical of many that the fledgling Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) had been receiving from anxious potential settlers and immigrants. Asserting their eagerness to emigrate, these letters often sought to clarify whether India had any agreements with foreign – often Western – countries to facilitate Indian immigration. As one letter from Bombay noted in October 1952, 'the difficulty is that there are so many immigration laws in every country that I do not know exactly in which country I can easily get entry.'[2] These letters made for uncomfortable reading for Indian officials: not only did people want to leave a newly-independent India – one letter proclaimed to be 'pleased to go anywhere outside India as a permanent settler', the word 'anywhere' underlined testily by an MEA official – there were few countries that allowed the entry of Indian immigrants.[3] Indeed, the only two countries with whom India had arrangements to facilitate Indian immigration were Canada and the United States, with a paltry quota of 150 and 100 immigrants each year respectively.[4] Even in the case of neighbouring countries across the Bay of Bengal with long histories of Indian migration and considerable Indian populations, there were growing restrictions aimed at preventing the entry of Indians alongside attempts to repatriate existing Indian communities.[5] As a response to such developments and anti-indenture protests earlier on, the Indian state had itself become increasingly involved in governing the mobility of Indians. Indian emigration law had banned 'unskilled' labour emigration to many

[1] Letter from C. B. Purohit, 2.3.53, External Affairs Department (UK branch), 1024(41), 'Bilateral agreements and arrangements in respect of immigration between India and foreign countries', National Archives of India, New Delhi (NAI hereafter)

[2] Letter from B. H. Desai, 28.10.52, (UK) 1024(41), NAI

[3] Letter from S. D. Parmar, 2.12.52, (UK) 1024(41), NAI

[4] Reply from Raja-Rana of Jubbal, 1.5.52, (UK) 1024(41), NAI

[5] See Sunil S. Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013) for an authoritative account of these migrations.

countries well before 1947 and increasingly sought to regulate the mobility of the other category of 'free', 'skilled' migrants.[6]

At the dawn of independence, India thus encountered a deeply hierarchical international system exemplified by severe restrictions on the mobility of prospective Indian migrants, and widespread crises of citizenship faced by overseas Indians settled across the 'British world'. While this considerably shaped the making of India's identity as an international actor both before and after independence,[7] I am interested in understanding exactly *how* Indian diplomacy sought to navigate the unequal status of India and its overseas communities. I do so by interrogating the striking persistence of the term 'reciprocity' in colonial and postcolonial Indian diplomatic discourse, reading reciprocity as a framework for diplomatic interaction aimed at securing the equal status of overseas Indians and India's parity with the white Dominions. With the important exception of Radhika Mongia, much of the relevant literature ignores the salience of 'reciprocity' as a conceptual structure even as it pays attention to reciprocity resolutions and the like adopted by India.[8] Instead, I trace the evolution of 'reciprocity' in Indian diplomacy before and after 1947 as a framework negotiating the limits of sovereignty and cooperation. I interrogate India's 'reciprocity resolution' at the imperial conferences, where reciprocity was less about securing equality of treatment for overseas Indians and more about establishing some semblance of a sovereign status for India – a seat at the imperial table that made it capable of reciprocity vis-à-vis the white Dominions. Severe criticism about such a conception of reciprocity, exemplified in the particular instance of India's ineffective 1943 Reciprocity Act aimed at South Africa, led to considerable modifications in the utility of the framework. Examining the sovereign postcolonial state's negotiation of Commonwealth membership on the basis of 'reciprocity of citizenship', I argue that this was explicitly aimed at securing the 'un-foreignness' if not citizenship rights of overseas Indians. While scholars have examined the importance of the United Nations as an arena for India's anticolonial, antiracist politics, I argue that the Commonwealth was another significant arena in which Indian diplomacy sought to achieve these goals vis-à-vis overseas Indians.[9] As Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru

[6] Radhika Viyas Mongia, *Indian Migration and Empire: A Colonial Genealogy of the Modern State.* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018)

[7] I delve into this in great detail in terms of diplomatic representation in Chapter 3

[8] Mongia, *Indian Migration and Empire.* I have drawn on her exciting recent work on the principle of reciprocity in migration control. Mongia does not however view this in terms of diplomatic practice.

[9] See Manu Bhagavan, *India and the Quest for One World: The Peacemakers*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)

acknowledged, 'there is one major reason for our remaining in the Commonwealth and that is that a very large number of Indians live abroad in what are called British colonies or dependencies.'[10]

'Reciprocity of citizenship' was thus a means to call the bluff of the Commonwealth 'family', seeking to address the status of overseas Indians in British colonial territories and Commonwealth nations at much the same time that the 1948 British Nationality Act (BNA) delineated multiple possibilities of citizenship that would impact them. Contrary to much of the literature that suggests a clean break between the Indian state and its diaspora after 1947, I argue that Indian diplomacy continued to engage with overseas Indians in complex, even paradoxical ways. That is, the Indian state sought to negotiate the status of its overseas communities through frameworks of reciprocity, even as they acknowledged the limits of being 'trapped' into notions of reciprocity-as-equality – such were the realities of performing postcolonial diplomacy in a deeply unequal international order. [11]

EMIGRATION AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

While there was little precedent for attempts to regulate emigration until the establishment of the Indian indentured labour system – indeed, the term 'emigrant' in Indian law referred only to indentured labourers until 1915 – this had increasingly become an arena of great scrutiny for the Government of India.[12] Campaigns critiquing indenture as a 'new form of slavery' had 'precipitated state control of migration along the axis of freedom', with the Indian state putting in place mechanisms and contracts to affirm the 'free' nature of indentured migration. [13] Debates over the freedom and agency of the migrant (or the lack of it) sought to draw a distinction between heavily regulated indentured migration and the comparatively less scrutinised 'free' non-indentured migration (a 'more free, 'free' migration', as Mongia notes).[14] This distinction of freedom was one of great emotive and political significance, carrying with it markers of caste and class. For instance, 'free' 'passenger Indians' in South Africa – a term used broadly to

[10] Quoted in Michael Brecher, 'India's decision to remain in the Commonwealth,' *Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 12, no. 1, (1974): 69

[11] Gandhi uses the word 'trapped' as a means of defining India's early attempts at reciprocity. See 'Indians in South Africa', excerpted from Young India, 6.9.19, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (CWMG hereafter), Vol 16, (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Trust, 1964), 88-89

[12] Radhika Viyas Mongia, 'Race, Nationality, Mobility: A History of the Passport,' *Public Culture*, 11, no. 3, (1999): 532

[13] Mongia, *Indian Migration and Empire*, 19

[14] Mongia, *Indian Migration and Empire*, 19

refer to those who paid for their own passage – utilised this distinction as a crucial marker of differentiation from the much maligned coolie, instead identifying themselves as much more deserving of the rights that came with British subject status.[15] These binaries between 'free' and 'coolie' migrants were often blurred, even in the case of old patterns of circular and chain migration across the Bay of Bengal – viewed as both 'entirely natural', 'free' migration and as a 'regularly organized system of kidnapping'.[16] By the 1870s, the hitherto less surveyed migration to Ceylon, Burma and Malaya was also heavily regulated, drawing on procedures governing indentured labour emigration in the sugar colonies to appoint a 'Protector of immigrants' in Malaya, for instance.[17]

By the early 20th century, categories of 'free' and indentured Indians were increasingly transmuted as 'skilled' and 'unskilled' Indians – imbued with the same distinctions of caste and class. Severe restrictions however prevented the entry of either category of Indian migrant into the white Dominions, despite nominal arrangements for a miniscule percentage of 'skilled', 'respectable' Indians in some cases.[18] By the 1920s, long histories of Indian migration had given way to rising hostility in regions such as Burma, Malaya and Ceylon where indigenous nationalist movements were contesting the rights of Indian labour migrants and their claim to nationality and citizenship. Pressed into action, the Government of India passed the Indian Emigration Act of 1922, creating a formal legal infrastructure for the governance of both 'skilled' and 'unskilled' emigration, delineating the ports from which Indians could emigrate and the countries to which emigration was permitted (declared by notification in the Gazette of India). The law also facilitated the appointment of Protectors of Emigrants and medical inspectors in the ports of departure, while enabling the Government of India 'for the purpose of safeguarding the interests of emigrants in any place outside British India (to) appoint persons to be agents in such places and … define their powers and duties.'[19] This was a highly significant diplomatic move, resulting in the appointment of quasi-consular Agents in regions such as Malaya and Ceylon which comprised significant numbers of Indian migrants[20]

---

[15] See Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed, *The South African Gandhi: Stretcher-Bearer of Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 49 and Sukanya Banerjee, *Becoming Imperial Citizens: Indians in the Late-Victorian Empire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 83

[16] Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal*, 130-131

[17] Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal*, 130

[18] See Radhika Singha, 'The Great War and a 'Proper' Passport for the Colony: Border-Crossing in British India, c.1882–1922,' *Indian Economic and Social History Review,* 50, no. 3 (2013): 289–315.

[19] 'A Collection of the Acts of the Indian Legislature and of the Governor General for the year 1922', (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1923), 40-53.
Available at https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.210300

[20] Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal*, 176

This legislation also provided the framework for the Indian government's decision to ban the emigration of unskilled labour to countries where there was worsening discrimination against Indians. Unskilled labour emigration to Malaya and Ceylon was banned in 1938 and 1939 respectively – following increasing disputes with the concerned governments regarding the wages and treatment of Indian labour.[21] This 'solution' had been a long time in the making, drawing again from the campaigns of nationalist anti-indenture activists who had argued that banning the emigration of indentured labourers was the best way to prevent their exploitation and avoid bringing further shame to India.[22] Indeed as P. Kodanda Rao, writer and secretary to the diplomat Sir V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, pointed out, 'It is humiliating to hear that her nationals should be considered undesirable and excluded. If Indians are not wanted elsewhere, it will be a lesser hurt to her self-respect to impose restrictions on emigrations from India.'[23] While these bans neither addressed the movement of 'skilled' labourers nor the discrimination faced by those Indians who had already migrated to these regions, the paternalistic Indian state's decision to ban 'unskilled' labour was viewed as a long-overdue measure to 'protect' and preserve national honour.[24] In so doing, it delineated a particular class of Indians as more eligible to travel abroad as representatives of India: this narrative governed the grant of passports long after independence, as we shall see in chapter four. Indeed, echoing past critiques of indentured labourers, MEA officials noted in 1953 that unlike their unskilled counterparts, the skilled Indian was more capable of agency and 'does not, it is felt, need the same degree of protection as unskilled workers and can very well look after his own interests.'[25]

These were also the Indians regarded as more likely to stand a chance of entry into much coveted Western spaces: officials declared that 'there may be no objection to allow the few (skilled) workers, who can find a better footing in a country abroad to stay there, subject to the local immigration regulations permitting them to do so.'[26] The creation of

---

[21] Kernial Singh Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya: Some Aspects of Their Immigration and Settlement (1786-1957)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 114 and Amita Shastri, 'Estate Tamils, the Ceylon citizenship act of 1948 and Sri Lankan politics,' *Contemporary South Asia*, 8, no. 1 (1999): 72. Also see Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal*, 193

[22] A temporary ban on indentured labour emigration to Mauritius and the West Indies was in place following protests in the 1830s. Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal*, 130

[23] P. Kodanda Rao, 'Indians Overseas', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 233, no. 1 (1944), 204

[24] See Ashutosh Kumar, *Coolies of the Empire: Indentured Indians in the Sugar Colonies, 1830-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017)

[25] File 20(5)-PV(I)/53, 'Guarantees in respect of skilled workers emigrating to overseas countries', NAI

[26] File 20(5)-PV(I)/53, NAI

immigration control in white settler colonies was a considerably recent development spurred by this migration of non-indentured 'free' Indians who were not subject to any of the internal restrictions on emigration encountered by indentured Indians.[27] These Indians asserted their right to imperial citizenship and free mobility within the Empire by drawing on their status as British subjects.[28]

Debates pitted the normative equality of all British subjects and freedom of movement within the Empire against the claims of white settler colonies who defined their nation-state as bounded, and sovereignty as the right to prevent the entry of 'undesirables' into their territories.[29] This had significant consequences for the mobility of Indians and the common British subject status. As an anxious Canadian government sought to prevent the entry of growing numbers of Indians, the Government of India cautioned against legislating blatantly racially exclusionary frameworks that would expose the fallacy of equality and 'imperial citizenship'. Instead, they recommended racial exclusion by other means. A bevy of techniques were used to effect racial discrimination without naming race: literacy tests, monetary requirements, and even recourse to climatic explanations with the Canadian authorities expressing much concern for the health of migrants unsuited to the brazen cold.[30] The measure eventually implemented by Canadian authorities sought to prevent the entry of Indians by permitting only those who 'come from [their] country of birth or citizenship by continuous journey.'[31]

The famous 1914 voyage of the Komagata Maru exemplified many of these debates: the chartered ship carrying Punjabi migrants from Hong Kong to Canada was an attempt to confront Canadian immigration restrictions and assert their rights as British subjects. Indeed, they would claim as proof of their mobility the fact that 'as long as we are British subjects, any British territory is the land of our citizenship.'[32] Even though these claims of equality between India and the Dominions were rejected, the passengers and supporters of the Komagata Maru had challenged the limits of Dominion sovereignty.

---

[27] See Mongia, *Indian Migration and Empire* for an excellent exploration of this.

[28] Sukanya Banerjee, *Becoming Imperial Citizens: Indians in the Late-Victorian Empire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010)

[29] See Mongia, 'Race, Nationality, Mobility' and Sherally Munshi, 'Immigration, Imperialism, and the Legacies of Indian Exclusion,' *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities*, 28. no. 1, (2016).

[30] This education or literacy test was particularly popular among the dominions, starting with Natal's legislation and later followed by Australia and New Zealand too. See W. K. Hancock, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs: Volume I, Problems of Nationality, 1918–1936* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1937), 173

[31] Munshi, 'Immigration, Imperialism,' 14

[32] Mongia, 'Race, Nationality, Mobility,' 543

Not only did they assert the dominance of the overarching imperial framework of shared British subject status, many decried the illegitimacy of Canadian attempts to designate who can enter 'their' territory, 'insisting that Britons and Europeans were foreign intruders and settlers who occupied lands that did not belong to them.'[33] Yet, far from considering Indians as fellow British subjects with the right to citizenship and mobility, white Dominions regarded them as aliens, seditious and 'undesirable' immigrants, designating them as potent public health threats to the body politic of white societies – narratives that would continue to cast a shadow on Indian migrants long after.[34] Such discourse was the overarching concern of Indian diplomatic representatives who sought to affirm the equal status of overseas Indians at imperial conferences.

RECIPROCITY AND A PLACE AT THE IMPERIAL TABLE

India's attempts to negotiate the inequities of the international system it confronted – exemplified by the status of overseas Indians – were marked by the pervasive presence of the term 'reciprocity'. As a concept with resonance in international law, 'reciprocity' was widely discussed in the context of India's status within the Empire, particularly in relation to the Dominions; at imperial conferences where Indian diplomats sought to assert the equality of British subjects, this was a term rapidly coming into vogue. Spearheaded by the liberal diplomat Sir Satyendra Sinha, the Imperial War Conference of 1917 adopted a resolution calling for reciprocity between India and the dominions with regard to the question of immigration. That is, it postulated that the treatment of Indians in dominions would shape India's 'reciprocal' policies relating to Dominion nationals who were in India. As Thakur has argued, this resolution had however been watered down by the India Office, with a remarkable clause added to assure the Dominions that 'it is an inherent function of the governments of the several communities of the British Commonwealth, including India, that each should enjoy complete control of the composition of its own population by means of restriction on immigration from any of the other communities.'[35]

---

[33] Renisa Mawani, *Across Oceans of Law: The Komagata Maru and Jurisdiction in the Time of Empire*, (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 155

[34] See Anjali Gera Roy, 'Making and Unmaking of Strangers – The Komagata Maru Episode and the Alienation of Sikhs as Undesirable Persons,' *Sikh Formations*, 12, no. 1 (2016): 67-86. In Chapter 5, I discuss the delineation of Indian immigrants in Britain as a 'public health threat'.

[35] A. T. Yarwood, 'The Overseas Indians as a Problem in Indian and Imperial Politics at the End of World War One', *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 14, no. 2, (1968), 214. See also Vineet Thakur, 'Liberal, Liminal and Lost: India's First Diplomats and the Narrative of Foreign Policy,' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History,* 45, no. 2, (2017): 232-258,

Unfazed by the criticism regarding such privileging of territorial sovereignty over free mobility within Empire, Sinha noted that it was the 'fundamental right' of every 'governing country' to do so. He argued that he 'could not insist on unlimited numbers of my countrymen having the right to settle in Canada or Australia … I could not contemplate similar settlements say of our English subjects in Kashmir or our Negro fellow subjects in the plains of the Bengal.'[36] Even as Sinha regarded this resolution as a considerable victory, it was not lost on many critics that this represented a 'distinct gain' for the dominions, reiterating their right to restrict Indian immigration and cementing a diminished notion of a common imperial citizenship and free emigration within Empire.[37] Given that South Africa was the main target of India's attempts to seek 'reciprocity', their passage of the discriminatory Asiatics act of 1919 almost immediately after the adoption of the reciprocity resolution was a grave reality check on the limits and meanings of 'reciprocity'. Indeed as Mohandas Gandhi argued, 'It is murdering the language to use so good a word as reciprocity for so bad a cause as the one under notice … we must at least recognize it by its correct name – which is retaliation.'[38]

The illusory terminologies of 'reciprocity' are worth interrogating as a commentary on notions of sovereignty and equality. Frameworks of reciprocity relied on a conception of the international system as made up of territorially sovereign nation states, potentially capable of cooperation. It is not a coincidence that this term gained considerable provenance from the nineteenth century onwards when notions of sovereignty were being increasingly defined not as a universal concept stemming from natural law, but as one which required the reciprocal recognition of (Western) states. That is, 'states outside European civilization must formally enter into the circle of law-governed countries', their sovereignty derived from the constitutive recognition of European states permitting their entry into the 'family of nations.'[39] Paradoxically enough, sovereignty was both a precondition for reciprocity between states and was itself derived from the reciprocal recognition bestowed by states. As Inayatullah and Blaney have argued:

---

[36] Satyendra Sinha, *Speeches and Writings of Lord Sinha: With a Portrait and a Sketch* (Madras: G. A. Natesan & Company, 1919), 102

[37] Hancock, *Survey Of British Commonwealth Affairs Vol 1*, 172. See also Mrinalini Sinha, 'Whatever happened to the Third British empire?: Empire, Nation Redux,' in *Writing imperial histories,* ed, Andrew S Thompson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016)

[38] 'Indians in South Africa', *CWMG*, Vol 16, 88-89

[39] W. H. Hall, as quoted in Lydia H. Liu, 'The Desire for the Sovereign and the Logic of Reciprocity in the Family of Nations,' *Diacritics*, 29, no. 4, (1999), 169

> The act of reciprocal recognition is necessary to create the condition in which states treat each other as discrete and disparate entities … Other states participate in a fundamental way in the constitution of a state: their acts of recognition are part of creating the sovereign statehood of the other. Thus, as a-social as the outcome may seem, the creation of a society of sovereign states is inherently a social process, involving the mutual constitution of states.[40]

Within the 'family' of the British Empire-Commonwealth of the time, official conceptions of reciprocity relied on a reading of Dominion autonomy as a territorially bounded nation-state with the right to restrict immigration and define its own population: this was, in effect, the terms of reciprocity extended to India. Thus reciprocity vis-à-vis immigration had to take into account three different categories of Indians: indentured and 'unskilled' Indians, 'free' Indians who had already migrated to the Dominions, and the 'free' 'skilled' Indians who sought to travel or settle in the Dominions concerned. Increasing protests against the system of indentured labour marked the year leading up to the 1917 imperial conference. In February 1916, Charles Freer Andrews and William Pearson, anti-indenture campaigners and supporters of the nationalist movement, published their much-discussed report on the conditions of Indian labour in Fiji. A month later, the nationalist leader Madan Mohan Malaviya moved a resolution calling for the abolition of the indenture system.[41] The scandal of the 1914 Komagata Maru voyage and the long history of discrimination against Indians in South Africa were vivid in public memory – the latter especially thanks to the recent return of Gandhi in 1915. In this political climate, Indian officials negotiating terms of reciprocity at the imperial conference were in an unenviable position: as W. K. Hancock has perceptively noted, 'they had to resist simultaneously immigration-promotion policies which implied Indian inferiority, and immigration-restriction policies which implied the same inferiority.'[42]

This reciprocity over immigration restrictions was to be implemented through the formalization of the Indian passport system, a 'mechanism that would conceal race and the racist motivations for controlling mobility in the guise of a reciprocal arrangement

---

[40] Naeem Inayatullah and David L. Blaney, 'Realizing Sovereignty', *Review of International Studies*, 21, no. 1, (1995), 12

[41] For the debate on the range of dates attributed to the end of the system of indenture, see footnote 6 in Rachel Sturman, 'Indian indentured labor and the history of international rights regimes,' *The American Historical Review*, 119, no. 5, (2014), 1441.

[42] Hancock, *Survey Of British Commonwealth Affairs Vol 1*, 182

between states described as national."[43] Indeed the Defence of India (Passport) Rules came into effect in 1915 after the Government of India had resisted earlier suggestions from Australia and Canada to use passports as a means of regulating Indian immigration, on the grounds that this effaced the equality and mobility of British subjects.[44] Notably, indentured labourers did not qualify for the grant of passports under this act: indeed this was in some ways the very purpose of the passport system for India. Enshrining the government's control over the mobility of 'free' Indians too, this act enabled the discretionary grant of passports as a 'civic credential' only for 'respectable' Indians most eligible to represent India abroad. Indian officials sought to convince the white Dominions to permit the migration and travel of this category of Indians: indeed as Sinha argued at the imperial conference in 1918, India would ensure 'that the system of passports now in existence be continued which would prevent any influx of undesirable labour population."[45]

The 1922 Indian Emigration Act banning the emigration of unskilled labour – following the abolition of the indenture system – likewise reiterated the disparate categories of Indian migrants. In practical terms, reciprocity with the Dominions regarding immigration restrictions did not pertain as much to indentured Indians whose influx was widely regarded as embarrassing for India. For those seeking to travel to the Dominions on a temporary basis, 'reciprocity' would be established through the system of passports provided by India, and visas stamped by the country to which they were traveling, thereby permitting their entry.[46] The terms of 'reciprocity' elaborated by Sinha, drawing from the acceptance of the 1917 reciprocity resolution, also enabled the entry of the wives and minor children of those Indians already settled in the Dominions and set the stage for more diplomatic attempts to negotiate an improved status for them.[47]

For all these meager gains, the great significance of 'reciprocity' for India lay in the fact that this implied a reciprocal recognition and acceptance of its quasi-sovereign status, a symbolic parity of sorts with the Dominions at a time when it was increasingly

---

[43] Mongia, 'Race, Nationality, Mobility,' 553-554

[44] See Yarwood, 'The Overseas Indians' and Singha, 'The Great War and a 'Proper' Passport for the Colony.'

[45] Sinha, *Speeches and Writings of Lord Sinha*, 172

[46] Thakur, 'Liberal, Liminal and Lost,' 240

[47] Sinha, *Speeches and Writings of Lord Sinha*, 171. In 1950, Indian diplomats successfully reached an agreement with Canada allowing for the emigration of 150 Indians per year. See the annual report of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 1950-51
https://mealib.nic.in/?pdf2477?000

attempting to speak as a distinct international actor. Indeed the 1917 imperial conference had been the first time that India – a non self-governing nation – was invited to participate as an equal member, and the first time that the three-member delegation comprised of two Indians. The precondition of sovereignty upon which rested the concept of 'reciprocity' had considerable allure for India at a time when its status had been considerably enhanced by the scale of its contribution during the First World War, and lent more ballast to its increasing demands to be treated on a par with the Dominions. In the words of one Indian politician, "Will the Imperial Government … be reluctant to remove once and for all our badge of inferiority and … raise us in the scale of nations?"[48]

India's very presence at the imperial conference was a performance of national identity and status derived from its newfound seat at the international table, alongside the white Dominions. Indeed in discussing the 'success' of the 1917 conference, Sinha counted as his first victory the adoption of his resolution calling on the Dominions to revoke a 1907 Colonial conference resolution excluding India from the conferences and to assure that India would be represented in all future conferences. This marked 'the definite and irrevocable admission of India into the great partnership of the British Empire,' facilitated by the Dominions' recognition of India as an international actor inching towards sovereign status and thereby capable of reciprocity.[49] As Sinha gushed at a royal banquet in Delhi honouring India's representatives at the imperial conference, this was a unique opportunity to perform diplomacy as a fledgling state:

> One must remember *the nature of the meetings in which it is our privilege to take part.* It was a War Conference, a War Cabinet of the Empire summoned for definite and specific purposes. We were there more to receive than to give information, and principally as to the immediate needs and necessities of the War. Nevertheless, we were free to express our opinions on all matters under discussion, and on all occasions when we felt it was necessary to express our views, *we were given as patient and as courteous a hearing as any of the great statesmen, who took part in those memorable meetings.*[50]

[48] Quoted in Thakur, 'Liberal, Liminal and Lost,' 236-237

[49] See Sinha, *Speeches and Writings of Lord Sinha*, 98-100

[50] Sinha, *Speeches and Writings of Lord Sinha*, 101. Italics added.

Indeed V. S. Srinivasa Sastri – who would be India's representative at the 1921 imperial conference – argued that the post-war recognition of India's rising status and move towards self-government had 'gained strength from the presence of India's representatives at the seat of empire among the leading lights of the empire.'[51] Reading this imperial conference as a 'forum that catapulted India into international consciousness as a diplomatic unit' and 'reciprocity' as a recognition of India's international status vis-à-vis the Dominions helps illuminate the salience and limitations of the resolutions adopted.[52] The fact that these terms of reciprocity related only to the subject of immigration control is particularly significant: indeed it served to cement a notion of the nascent Indian state's autonomy as derived through the (reciprocal) administrative control over mobility and migration. While many critics argued that this did little in the way of enabling sovereignty in any real sense, the larger problem lay in the fact that even the nominal recognition of India's national status and right to be represented at the imperial conference did not imply a recognition of the rights of Indians.[53] Reciprocity was thus largely relegated to a performance of administrative statehood at the cost of Indian claims to common imperial citizenship. Indeed as Gandhi argued:

> The Imperial conference resolution on the status of our countrymen emigrating to the Colonies reads well on the surface but it is highly deceptive. We need not consider it a great achievement that we may pass laws against the colonials that they may pass against us. It is like a giant telling a dwarf that the latter is free to give blow for blow. Who is to refuse permission and passports to the colonials desiring to enter India?[54]

A year later, when these accepted terms of reciprocity were again cited as a way in which India could respond to the South African government regarding the 1919 Asiatics act, Gandhi warned against falling into the 'trap' of reciprocity. Asserting that reciprocity was a futile form of administrative retaliation that made no gains for the people it claimed to protect, he noted:

---

[51] V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, *Speeches and Writings of the Rt Hon V.S Srinivasa Sastri*, (Madras: G. A. Natesan & Co, 1924), 86

[52] Stephen Legg, 'An international anomaly? Sovereignty, the League of Nations and India's princely geographies,' *Journal of Historical Geography*, 43 (2014), 99. Legg also elaborates on the limitations of India's exceptional status as a member of the League of Nations.

[53] For a fascinating critique of some of the resolutions adopted by the imperial conference, see Sastri's Nasik Conference Address in *Speeches and Writings of the Rt Hon V.S Srinivasa Sastri*, 75-134

[54] 'Imperial conference resolutions', published in New India, 15.8.18, *CWMG,* Vol 15, 20

> It is terrible to think of it (reciprocity as retaliation) when it is men and women who constitute the stake. What comfort can it be to our countrymen in South Africa for India to be able to send back a steamer-load of cargo from South Africa, to refuse to send to South Africa a few tons of coal and to shut the gates of India in the face of a stray South African tourist … as against the banishment … of a hundred and fifty thousand Indian settlers.[55]

That is, the recognition of India's 'equal' status within Empire and nominal statehood had not extended to recognizing the citizenship rights of its people. These were the limitations that Sir V. S. Srinivasa Sastri and the Indian delegation sought to go beyond in the 1921 Imperial conference by framing the reciprocity resolution as a 'compromise' adopted by India precisely in order to guarantee the equality and citizenship rights of Indians already domiciled in the Dominions.[56] Thus, for those Indians who were 'lawfully settled, they must be admitted into the general body of citizenship and no deduction must be made from the rights that other British subjects enjoy.'[57] Skillfully drawing on Lloyd-George's own remarks describing the Empire as a 'Confederation of Races into which willing and free peoples had been admitted', Sastri pitched this as his very argument too in putting forth the citizenship rights of overseas Indians: 'consent is incongruous with inequality of races, and freedom necessarily implies admission of all peoples to the rights of citizenship without reservation.'[58] Although some modifications were made, the conference adopted the Indian resolution recognizing the 'incongruity between India's position as an equal member of the British empire and the existence of disabilities upon British Indians lawfully domiciled in some other parts of the British Empire.'[59] Indeed the resolution asserted that 'the rights of such Indians to citizenship should be recognized.'[60] Despite the fact that it did not specify particular policies in this regard, this was a great diplomatic victory for India. South Africa's protestations had not prevented the adoption of the resolution, making it the 'the first time that India's

---

[55] 'Indians in South Africa', *CWMG,* Vol 16, 88-89

[56] See Hancock, *Survey Of British Commonwealth Affairs Vol 1* and Thakur, 'Liberal, Liminal, Lost'

[57] Opening Speech by the Honourable V. Srinivasa Sastri, 'Conference of Prime Ministers and Representatives of the United Kingdom, The Dominions, and India Held in June, July, and August, 1921. Summary of Proceedings and Documents', (London : H. M. Stationery Office, 1921), 34

[58] 'Conference of Prime Ministers and Representatives', 34.

[59] 'Conference of Prime Ministers and Representatives', 8. For an overview of the modifications made, see Thakur, 'Liberal Liminal, Lost,' 246

[60] 'Conference of Prime Ministers and Representatives', 8.

concerns had been recognized over the concerns of a white dominion in a resolution at an Imperial Conference … the first ever resolution passed without unanimity.'[61]

The optimism brought about by this 1921 resolution was short-lived, even for liberals such as Sastri. While there was some improvement for already domiciled Indians in the Dominions, with Australia granting full citizenship rights in 1925 for instance, the status of Indians in South Africa and British colonies in Africa was worsening.[62] In Kenya, the 1923 'Devonshire declaration' rejected long-held Indian demands by excluding Indians from the highlands and extending the franchise to Indians only on a communal basis – a 'national humiliation', as the Viceroy, Lord Reading, termed it.[63] Even while there were no limits on Indian immigration – indeed Sastri had firmly argued that the imperial conference resolutions permitting immigration controls pertained only to Dominions and not Crown colonies[64] – the declaration controversially asserted the principle of 'native paramountcy' in order to reject Indian demands, no doubt 'mere smokescreens to preserve white dominance.'[65] A fuming Sastri expressed his great disappointment with the Devonshire declaration, reiterating Indian perceptions of their role in Kenya as part of the civilizing mission:

.

> We are the only people now that do anything to teach and train the Native in the arts of civilised life … After many years during which we were invited, employed and encouraged, to be now told … that we are a danger to the Native … a moral and physical infection and that our future immigration must be controlled and finally stopped; – this is a refinement of ingratitude and tyranny, the thought of which still lacerates my heart.[66]

This 'betrayal' was one of many pertaining to the treatment of overseas Indians that disillusioned those demanding Dominion status as a means of equality within Empire. Even as Tej Bahadur Sapru led the Indian charge at the imperial conference in 1923 against the developments in Kenya and rebutted Smuts' attempts to set aside previous resolutions asserting the equality and citizenship rights of Indians settled in Dominions,

---

[61] Thakur, 'Liberal Liminal, Lost,' 246

[62] Daniel Gorman, *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 126

[63] Sana Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya: The Politics of Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 108

[64] Gorman, *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s*, 127-128

[65] Latha Varadarajan, *The Domestic Abroad: Diasporas in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 59

[66] Sastri, 'The Kenya Betrayal', *Speeches and Writings of the Rt Hon V. S. Srinivasa Sastri*, 508

these diplomatic representations did not amount to much; Sastri had in fact suggested that Sapru withdraw.[67] For a dependent India unable to effect much change in the treatment of overseas Indians, the chimera of 'reciprocity' had come full circle. As Sastri pointed out:

> I well remember being told in I921: 'If we hit you, why don't you hit us in return? We have accorded you full power of reciprocity.' Where one is in the grip of a big bully, patient and philosophic submission is no remedy. To hit out with all one's strength may not be effective either, but it is at least a vindication of one's manhood. The poet has said that the imprisoned cobra strikes not so much to punish the tormentor, as out of wounded pride.[68]

In many ways it was helpless yet 'wounded pride' that defined India's decision to retaliate against South Africa's Trading and Occupation of Land (Natal and Transvaal) Act in 1943. The act renewed the segregationist policy of the 1939 Transvaal Act that had imposed a two-year ban on 'the sale or hire of property and the issue of new trade licences to Indians in the Transvaal' as a means of tackling Indian 'penetration'.[69] Furious protests at the legislative council and an angry response from the Indian High Commissioner in South Africa, Shafa'at Ahmad Khan, calling for sanctions and the recall of the High Commissioner, led to the Reciprocity Act of 1943.[70] Even as Lord Wavell tried to prevaricate, the lack of a response from Smuts and the increasing virulence of protests in India – reaffirmed by Narayan Bhaskar Khare, the council member in charge of the Department of Indians Overseas who was under severe pressure to act – led to the Reciprocity Act being applied to South Africa in 1944. The Gazette of India thus announced that South African Europeans in India would be subjected to the same kinds of discrimination faced by Indian nationals in South Africa.[71]

---

[67] See footnote 32, chapter 2 in Hugh Tinker, *Separate and Unequal: India and Indians in the British Commonwealth, 1920-1950*, (London: C. Hurst & Co, 1976), 398

[68] Sastri, 'The Kenya Betrayal', *Speeches and Writings of the Rt Hon V. S. Srinivasa Sastri*, 505

[69] Lorna Lloyd, "A Family Quarrel'. The Development of the Dispute over Indians in South Africa,' *The Historical Journal*, 34, no. 3, (1991): 707

[70] See Vineet Thakur, 'The "hardy annual": A history of India's first UN resolution,' *India Review*, 16, no. 4, (2017): 401-429. The Indian High Commissioner was recalled in 1946 after the passage of the 'Ghetto Act' made it untenable to engage with South Africa. The same year, India took the issue of discrimination against Indians in South Africa to the United Nations, the first dispute to ever be taken to the General Assembly. See Lorna Lloyd, "A most auspicious beginning': the 1946 United Nations General Assembly and the question of the treatment of Indians in South Africa,' *Review of International Studies*, 16, no. 2, (1990): 131-153.

[71] For a detailed account of the events leading to the application of the Reciprocity act in 1944 see Hugh Tinker, *Separate and Unequal*, 222-232

This was of course a largely symbolic shot at retaliation, finally implementing long-discussed notions of reciprocity vis-à-vis the Dominions. Apart from the famed instance of Bombay's iconic Taj Mahal hotel installing a notice that South African visitors would not be permitted, there was not much that could be done. As the scholar Sripati Chandrasekhar quipped, 'the number of South Africans in India does not total even ten. Hence this is merely a matter of face-saving.'[72] As a state inching towards independence, 'reciprocity' as diplomatic practice meant the recognition of India's nationhood, growing status as an international actor, and claim to some semblance of parity with the Dominions in the British imperial system. Yet in so doing, it also exemplified the precarity of all these claims and the fact that despite their awareness of the severe limitations of reciprocity, this nevertheless remained one of the few diplomatic options available to India.

In seeking to explore the recurrence of the term 'reciprocity' in Indian discourse and reading it as an underlying framework for diplomatic practice, I have departed from much of the scholarship that has discussed the reciprocity resolutions adopted by India, without necessarily viewing reciprocity as a conceptual frame.[73] Moreover the few mentions of 'reciprocity' in the literature also largely focuses on this as a pre-1947 conception. Having traced the uses of reciprocity in colonial India's diplomacy, I will show that this remained a significant framework for the postcolonial state. Seeking to utilise India's newfound sovereignty as a means of negotiating the status of its overseas communities, the Government of India put forth a framework of 'reciprocity of citizenship' – a concept that underpinned the terms of its membership of the Commonwealth and also shaped discourse on Indian citizenship legislation. Addressing a lacuna in the literature on Indian diplomacy, diaspora and citizenship studies, I trace the uses and limitations of 'reciprocity of citizenship' and its correlation with the provisions of the 1948 British Nationality Act – a process that had far reaching consequences for the status of Indians domiciled in India and overseas.

---

[72] Sripati Chandrasekhar, 'The Emigration and Status of Indians in the British Empire,' *Social Forces,* 24, (1945), 157

[73] See, for instance, Thakur, 'Liberal, Liminal and Lost,' Tinker, *Separate and Unequal*, Hancock, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs: Volume I* and Lloyd, "A Family Quarrel'.

RECIPROCITY AND A PLACE AT THE COMMONWEALTH TABLE

The British Nationality Act of 1948 brought far-reaching consequences for the status and mobility of Indians, and other nationals of British colonies and dominions.[74] The passage of Canada's citizenship act in 1946 had been a 'revolutionary departure' undermining the existing 'common code' of British subject status by legislating that British subjecthood would instead be derived through the possession of Canadian citizenship.[75] The BNA was a response to this legislation, drawing on the Canadian framework to provide for British subject status on the basis of a 'local' citizenship. That is, British subject status would be derived through the 'gateway' of 'Citizenship of the United Kingdom and Colonies' (CUKC) or the Citizenship of Independent Commonwealth Countries – effectively attempting to provide a legal basis for nationality and citizenship through which the British empire and Commonwealth would be united in one framework. India called for the introduction of the term 'Commonwealth citizen' as an alternative to the term 'British subject': wary of being termed British subjects after independence at a time when they deliberated over their formal membership of the Commonwealth, this was seen as 'more acceptable to public opinion'.[76] While the latter term could not be dropped entirely, given the old Commonwealth's preference for it, British officials settled for a compromise wherein the BNA permitted individual countries to use the term they preferred.[77]

For India, the provisions of the BNA meant that once Indian citizenship legislation had been passed – thus providing 'local citizenship' as a gateway to British subject status – Indian citizens would thereby also become Commonwealth citizens, to use India's preferred term. The BNA also provided for a temporary status of 'British subjects without citizenship' until 'local citizenship' legislation was passed. This however meant that such temporary British subjects without citizenship would become Citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies if not covered by the provisions of local citizenship legislation. The BNA also recognized 'British Protected Persons', a provision which sought to cover those in territories over which Britain held Paramountcy (much like the

[74] 'Asian Relations: Being a report of the proceedings and documentation of the First Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, March–April 1947' (New Delhi: Asian Relations Organisation: 1948), 96

[75] See Randall Hansen, 'The politics of citizenship in 1940s Britain: the British Nationality Act,' *Twentieth Century British History* 10, no. 1 (1999), 74 and Jatinder Mann, 'The evolution of Commonwealth citizenship, 1945–1948 in Canada, Britain and Australia,' *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 50, no. 3, (2012): 293-313

[76] Tinker *Separate and Unequal*, 373

[77] Tinker, *Separate and Unequal*, 373. Tinker provides a detailed study of the opposition to the term 'Commonwealth citizen' among the dominions and many British officials themselves.

princely states of India), although they were not automatically given the status of Commonwealth citizenship.[78] The legislative complexities opened up by the BNA were particularly complicated in the case of overseas Indians resident in the entangled realm of British colonial territories and Commonwealth countries. They could potentially be Indian citizens, citizens of the United Kingdom and colonies, citizens of the country in which they resided, or temporary British subjects without citizenship. As we shall see in detail in Chapter 2, these overseas Indians were eligible for multiple, entangled claims to citizenship and yet were often viewed as a burden by all countries involved.

It is worth noting that these discussions over the British Nationality Act and its provisions of citizenship were taking place at much the same time that India was deliberating over its membership of the Commonwealth. Thus, India's proposal to change the BNA's terminology of 'British subject' status to 'Commonwealth citizenship' went hand in hand with its demand for 'reciprocity of citizenship' – rather than allegiance to the Crown – as an essential criteria for its formal entry into the Commonwealth. While fully aware of the limitations of calling for 'reciprocity' at the imperial conferences, independent India nevertheless pushed for 'reciprocity of citizenship' in the Commonwealth – attempting once again to address the status of its overseas communities at a time when they were facing crises of citizenship and statelessness in many regions. Perhaps viewing their achievement of sovereignty as likely to alter the effectiveness of reciprocity this time around, India's demand was nevertheless also essential to calling the bluff of a 'new' multiracial Commonwealth and justifying the decision to join an organisation of which South Africa was a member. India's decision to continue its membership of the Commonwealth was a subject of considerable debate, not least at the Indian Constituent Assembly:

> Sir, many of the speakers before me have described this Commonwealth more or less like the old pandits who describe Brahman- *"Neti," "Neti,"* "it is not this," "it is not this," "it is not this." I would humbly submit that the Commonwealth has a positive advantage … it is an indispensable alliance which is needed not only in the interest of India, but in the interest of world peace.[79]

[78] Rieko Karatani, *Defining British Citizenship: Empire, Commonwealth and Modern Britain* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003), 116

[79] K. M. Munshi, Constituent Assembly of India (CAI) debates, Vol 8, 17 May 1949. Available at http://cadindia.clpr.org.in/constitution_assembly_debates/volume/8/1949-05-17

K. M. Munshi's invocation of metaphysical discourses on the Brahman – the all pervasive, ultimate reality in Hindu philosophy, defined far easier in terms of what it is *not*, rather than what it is – was a perceptive if unusual metaphor for opposing narratives of India's membership of the Commonwealth. These narratives were nevertheless united in their ambiguity over the form this membership would take. Nehru himself exemplified this amorphous narrative in his speech calling on the Indian constituent assembly to ratify the 1949 London declaration reconciling India's 'continuing membership' of the Commonwealth of Nations with its march towards republican status.[80] Analysing the text of the declaration, he argued

> In this particular Declaration nothing very much is said about the position of the King except that he will be a symbol, but it has been made perfectly clear … that the *King has no functions* at all. He has a certain status. The *Commonwealth itself, as such, is no body,* if I may say so; *it has no organisation to function* and the *King also can have no functions*.[81]

Critics decried the paradoxical, incomprehensible nature of India's Commonwealth membership: in the words of Maulana Hasrat Mohani, member of the Constituent Assembly, 'When you accept full partnership in the Commonwealth, how can you escape accepting the King as the Head of the Commonwealth? ... I do not want any monster of this kind which is at once a Republic and a Dominion.'[82] The assembly's vigorous debate on Commonwealth membership touched upon a number of issues ranging from allegations that India had joined the imperialist and 'Anglo-American' power bloc to discussions of the limitations and possibilities of a Commonwealth that had no binding rules or rights. Yet no topic cut across the spectrum of opposing views as much as the emotive issue of overseas Indians. While critics argued that the Commonwealth was 'a house divided against itself (that) cannot stand … a group of nations half-slave and half-free (that) cannot endure', some supporters of India's membership suggested an amendment that India's membership would be ratified by the assembly 'provided the Commonwealth does not allow discrimination of Indians in South Africa and Australia

[80] India's republican constitution was still being formulated and would come into effect on 26 January 1950.

[81] Italics added. See Nehru's statement, CAI debates, Vol. 8, 16 May 1949. http://cadindia.clpr.org.in/constitution_assembly_debates/volume/8/1949-05-16

[82] Maulana Hasrat Mohani, CAI debates, Vol 8, 17 May 1949. http://cadindia.clpr.org.in/constitution_assembly_debates/volume/8/1949-05-17

and also metes out equal justice."[83] While South Africa was no doubt the most vivid example of the discrimination faced by overseas Indians, the Commonwealth as a whole was regarded as comprising countries that 'still regard Indians as an inferior race and enforce (sic) colour bar against them and deny them even the most elementary rights of citizenship."[84]

At the time of its membership of the Commonwealth and until 26 January 1950 when the constitution of India was adopted, India was a Dominion: a legal status rarely acknowledged in much of the literature, yet one that held considerable significance for the nascent Indian state, as Kumarasingham has pointed out.[85] Asserting that dominion status was only a 'temporary phase for an interim period' that would not get in the way of India's republican ideal, Nehru had argued that this would nevertheless enable the interim Indian government to inherit all the administrative, political structures and powers of the British Raj.[86] Not too long before Nehru's acceptance of temporary dominion status, Sir Benegal Narsing Rau – the famed jurist and civil servant who was later appointed adviser to the Indian Constituent Assembly – had prepared a draft 'Indo-British' treaty in 1945 with dominion sovereignty as its basis.[87] Temporary dominion status also by default placed India within the ambit of the Commonwealth, even as its political leadership sought to reconcile long-held Republican ideals with continuing Commonwealth membership. Despite the fact that the idea of a treaty between India and Britain as part of the transfer of power was eventually dropped, Rau's draft offers valuable insight into themes that would come to shape many an aspect of India's relationship with the Commonwealth.[88]

---

[83] Lakshminarain Sahu, CAI debates, Vol. 8, 16 May 1949.
http://cadindia.clpr.org.in/constitution_assembly_debates/volume/8/1949-05-16

[84] Shibban Lal Saksena, CAI debates, Vol. 8, 16 May 1949.
http://cadindia.clpr.org.in/constitution_assembly_debates/volume/8/1949-05-16

[85] Harshan Kumarasingham, "The 'Tropical Dominions': The Appeal of Dominion Status in the Decolonisation of India, Pakistan and Ceylon," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 23 (2013): 233-245. Also see Harshan Kumarasingham, 'The Indian Version of First among Equals – Executive Power during the First Decade of Independence,' *Modern Asian Studies*, 44, no. 4 (2010): 709–751.

[86] Nehru's letter to Sultan Shahrir, 17 June 1947, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (SWJN hereafter), Second Series, Vol 3, (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1985). Also see Kumarasingham, 'The Tropical Dominions.'

[87] See Arvind Elangovan, 'A Constitutional Imagination of India: Sir Benegal Narsing Rau amidst the Retreat of liberal Idealism (1910–1950)' (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 2012)

[88] With the notable exception of Elangovan's nuanced work, this treaty is rarely discussed in the literature. While his analysis is no doubt useful, Elangovan does not examine Rau's focus on foreign relations.

First, it reiterated 'reciprocity' as a framework for diplomatic relations between India and Britain (and other foreign states), calling for reciprocity of 'any privileges regarding entry or residence or trading or holding of office' for individuals. Significantly, it also called on the British government to reciprocate permission for diplomatic appointments by allowing the appointment of Indian High Commissioners, Trade Commissioners or Agents not just in the United Kingdom but in 'all territories directly administered by the British government like colonies, mandated territories etc.'[89] This was a rather prescient suggestion: as we will see in Chapter 3, India's quest to appoint diplomatic representatives in British colonial territories would be far from easy. Second, it identified the status of overseas Indians as important to the future 'conduct of foreign relations', arguing that the British government ought to ensure the 'equality of treatment' and 'equality of citizenship' of those it had sent as indentured labourers to colonial territories and at the very least 'stay neutral' in the case of disputes between India and South Africa.[90] These ideas of reciprocity and 'equality of citizenship' were further reinforced during Rau's travel to the United States, Canada, Ireland and Britain from October to December 1947 – authorized by the Constituent Assembly of India to consult with experts in relation to framing India's constitution. Rau was particularly interested in Ireland's approach to its relationship with Britain:

> Apparently in future, Irish citizens will not be British subjects, even outside Ireland, as they are at present; but they will have most of the privileges of British subjects. Reciprocally, British subjects will be granted similar privileges in Ireland, although they may not be Irish citizens. This indicates a possible mode of evolving a common citizenship – or something almost equivalent thereto – even as between countries that do not acknowledge a common allegiance, e.g, between any two members of the U.N on a basis of reciprocity. Thus, citizens of State 'A' will not be automatically citizens of State 'B'; but 'A' may grant, within its own boundaries, all or any of the privileges of citizenship to the citizens of 'B', provided 'B' does the same to the citizens of 'A'.[91]

Rau was not the only one considering ideas of common or 'reciprocal' citizenship and nationality. Indeed, citizenship was an underlying if sometimes paradoxical theme in

[89] Benegal Narsing Rau, *India's Constitution in the Making*, edited by B. Shiva Rao, (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1960), 432-433

[90] Rau, *India's Constitution in the Making*, 432

[91] Rau, *India's Constitution in the Making*, 330

India's diplomatic engagements at the cusp of independence and after – international relations shaped by and in turn shaping the status of overseas Indians. Taking the issue of Indians in South Africa to the United Nations in 1946 – 'a most auspicious beginning' for India's foreign policy, as Nehru remarked – India recognized their status as South African nationals and yet regarded it as India's 'moral' responsibility to intervene, given the denial of citizenship rights and equal treatment by the government of South Africa.[92] India's success at the General Assembly provided the mechanisms of the UN with 'a mandate to think beyond the limits of national sovereignty' when it came to issues of human rights violations and – more importantly for our analysis – indicated India's engagement with overseas Indians well beyond the limits of their citizenship or nationality status.[93] The Asian Relations Conference that followed, a few months later in March 1947, is seen in the academic literature as exemplifying a rather different reading of India's relationship with its overseas nationals. Itty Abraham has argued that the conference facilitated an an 'overnight' policy change in which the Indian state reterritorialised itself '… turning away from its diaspora, India's national boundaries were being redrawn to exclude any Indians who did not already live within its new territorial borders.'[94] According to him, this was in large part due to concerns raised by delegates at the conference about the numerical strength of Indian communities in their countries and the fear of an expansionist Indian state aided by this Indian diaspora that would function as a 'fifth column'. While there is no doubt that the Indian state had increasingly called on its overseas communities to identify with their countries of residence (even before independence), I argue that this was anything *but* a clear cut instance of the state cutting off ties with its diaspora. Indeed the disentanglement of overseas communities from the Indian state was drawn-out, messy and often paradoxical.

First, it is essential to complicate the narrative that marks the end of India's diplomatic engagement with overseas communities at the stroke of independence – the making of citizenship legislations in many countries where Indian communities had settled was often deeply contested and involved the considerable involvement of the Government of India in the months and years following 1947. Second, it is crucial to reiterate the

[92] Lloyd, 'A Most Auspicious Beginning,' 133

[93] Manu Bhagavan, 'A New Hope: India, the United Nations and the Making of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,' *Modern Asian Studies*, 44, no. 2 (2010), 325. India had succeeded in making South Africa an international issue, despite the lack of tangible gains for Indians in South Africa. Also see Lorna Lloyd, 'A Most Auspicious Beginning': The 1946 United Nations General Assembly and the Question of the Treatment of Indians in South Africa.

[94] Itty Abraham, *How India Became Territorial: Foreign Policy, Diaspora, Geopolitics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 70

heterogeneity of the Indian diaspora and the fact that Indians settled across the entangled realm of British colonial territories and Commonwealth countries had a distinct 'common status' as British subjects under the 1948 BNA. Indeed an Indian delegate at the Asian Relations Conference had flagged this aspect: 'If for example the problem of Indians in Ceylon is to be tackled on the basis of nationality and citizenship, so long as Indians share British nationality with Ceylon their claims arise from two different sources – first from the fact of Indian migration and second, on the basis of being in possession of British nationality. This duality prevented satisfactory solutions of the problem of Indians.'[95]

Examining India's contribution to the making of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as an integral part of India's vision of world community, Manu Bhagavan has pointed to a fascinating note written by Nehru in January 1947 regarding the value of the UDHR for overseas Indians.[96] Quoting his seemingly paradoxical suggestion that 'the rights of nationals must necessarily differ from those of non-nationals … in either event there should be no discrimination i.e. non-nationals should be treated alike,' Bhagavan draws on Abraham to argue that the 'non-nationals' referred to are the 'external populations' that India 'gave up all claims on', while ensuring that their fundamental rights were protected by the UDHR.[97] While this hardly meant that India did not engage with the status of its 'external populations' well after 1947, Bhagavan's larger point about the United Nations as a diplomatic framework for India's engagement with overseas Indians is well taken. Nehru's note, however, also addresses a particular context of the nationality question that Bhagavan does not refer to:

> We have recently had to face discrimination in South Africa, and in Ceylon and East Africa we are having difficulties … The question of nationality is a difficult one, more specially in the countries which have so far belonged to the British Empire or Commonwealth of Nations. I do not suppose that we need to go into this question at the Human Rights Commission.[98]

---

[95] 'Asian Relations', 96

[96] This was a vision of 'One World' that would utilise the United Nations as the vehicle of international progress. See Bhagavan, 'A New Hope,' 326

[97] Bhagavan, 'A New Hope,' 341

[98] Note by Nehru titled 'The Human Rights Commission', 14 Jan 1947, *SWJN,* Second Series, Vol 1, (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1984)

This is essential context not just since Nehru reiterates the continuing relevance of overseas Indians to Indian foreign policy objectives, but also in his special focus on the 'difficult', entangled nature of nationality – spurred by common British subject status – within the particular realm of British colonial territories and Commonwealth countries. This was an especially significant concern for Nehru at a time when India was beginning to negotiate its membership of the Commonwealth. In February 1947, the British Commonwealth Conference on Nationality and Citizenship deliberated on a draft of the BNA – although India had been invited to the conference, it had not been much involved with the proceedings. Strangely enough, the Indian High Commissioner, Samuel Runganadhan, was 'supposed to be present as observer but disappeared after the formal, opening session.'[99]

At any rate, this was a rather unfortunate conference to miss, given its focus on finding some sort of common approach to citizenship and the fact that its proceedings reiterated some of the concerns that had long defined India's negotiation of the Commonwealth connection. That is, while the White Dominions agreed in principle to guarantee equality between their citizens and all British subjects, there was no commitment to the fact that this would extend to non-white British subjects. As Karatani points out, 'all the participants, except the British delegates, were eager to make the common status as limited as possible.'[100] More worryingly for India, Ceylon and Burma too would delineate Indians as distinct from other British subjects. Burma noted that it would 'differentiate between two classes of British subjects – Indian nationals, and nationals of other Commonwealth countries', wherein the latter would be treated on par with Burmese citizens.[101] Ceylon asserted that there would be 'two classes of British subjects – Ceylon citizens and non-citizens who were British subjects by reason of birth there', with the latter including Indian immigrants, who would have to be accomodated by Indian citizenship or left stateless if they could not be covered by some provision of the BNA.[102]

Speaking to Lord Mountbatten in March 1947, a month after this conference, Nehru suggested that India's membership of the Commonwealth could be on the basis of 'some form of common nationality.'[103] While the question of what such a 'common nationality' might entail remained unclear and indeed Nehru was still unsure of whether India would

[99] See Mann, 'The evolution of Commonwealth citizenship,' 300 and Tinker, *Separate and Unequal*, 362
[100] Karatani, *Defining British Citizenship*, 123
[101] Tinker, *Separate and Unequal*, 363
[102] Tinker, *Separate and Unequal*, 364
[103] 'Account of Mountbatten's interview with Nehru', 24 March 1947, *SWJN,* Second series, Vol 2.

join the Commonwealth, 'reciprocity' was nevertheless again a persistent narrative from Indian officials. As Krishna Menon too argued in his letter to Mountbatten, 'Reciprocity of citizenship rather than a common Crown is frankly the hard core of Indo-British relations.'[104]

Even as the events of independence and Partition occupied the central focus of the Government of India, answers to the lingering question of Commonwealth membership were progressively more negative. In March 1948, the British Prime Minister Clement Attlee had written to Nehru to initiate talks on India's relationship with the Commonwealth, rejoicing that 'the family circle … (had) been enlarged … The British Commonwealth of Nations is now in effect the Commonwealth of British and Asiatic nations.'[105] The diversity of membership of the Commonwealth however meant, in Attlee's view, that the only link binding them together was their allegiance to the Crown. Arguing that India had no 'native tradition' of republicanism, he noted the benefits of having as head of state someone like the King 'who does not belong to any section of the community and therefore is neutral.'[106] For Nehru – who had not been keen on retaining the Commonwealth link – this was particularly disheartening. Writing to Krishna Menon, Nehru argued that while he did not wish to take a decision regarding this in a hurry, 'general public opinion will certainly favour our going out of the Commonwealth. In the balance I am myself inclined to think that this would be best.'[107] Mountbatten, for his part, had been dissuading Nehru from adopting the term 'Republic' in the Indian constitution, preferring instead 'Commonwealth or State'.[108] Despite Mountbatten and Attlee's efforts to wean India away from Republic status, Nehru would not consider such a prospect. As he would argue, 'If we use the word 'Republic', it may be possible to have a closer relationship with the UK than others … There is no chance at all for us to go back on this and I do not think we should.'[109]

Even as India prevaricated over the Commonwealth question, the balance was gently tilting towards the prospect of continued membership: indeed Nehru had begun to reiterate the Irish example to assure members of the Constituent Assembly that joining

[104] Letter from Krishna Menon to Lord Mountbatten, 13.3.47, Mountbatten papers: India, Viceregal official correspondence, 1947-48, Roll 3198, 13, File 111: Political Situation in India and Constitutional Position of the Viceroy (2), Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML hereafter)

[105] Letter from Clement Attlee to Nehru, 11.3.48, Jawaharlal Nehru private papers, J. N. (S. G.) file no. 14, NMML

[106] Letter from Clement Attlee to Nehru, 11.3.48, J. N. (S. G.) file no. 14, NMML

[107] Letter from Nehru to Krishna Menon, 6.4.48, J. N. (S. G.) file no. 8, NMML

[108] Letter from Nehru to Menon, 16.4.48, J. N. (S. G.) file no. 8, NMML

[109] Letter from Nehru to Menon, 16.4.48, J. N. (S. G.) file no. 8, NMML

the Commonwealth would not be at the cost of giving up on Republican status. While geopolitical concerns no doubt played a role[110], indeed particularly the question of the strategic disadvantages of India staying out of the Commonwealth while Pakistan joined, it is important to recognize that the status of overseas Indians in British colonies and the Commonwealth was intimately tied to India's decision regarding Commonwealth membership. At much the same time as the Government of India was pondering over this question, they were also negotiating with the governments of Burma and Ceylon, who had both framed citizenship legislation explicitly designed to exclude Indians.[111] These crises of citizenship and potential statelessness faced by overseas Indians are crucial to understanding both India's increasing inclination towards Commonwealth membership and its call for 'reciprocity of citizenship' as the basis.

While Kumarasingham considers the debate over India's proposal for Commonwealth citizenship and the status of the King as 'First Citizen of the Commonwealth', his focus is more on the question of reconciling the role of the monarchy with Indian membership of the Commonwealth as a Republic. Yet it is clear that the very proposal for reciprocity of Citizenship or Commonwealth citizenship stemmed from the status of overseas Indians. Indeed, as Nehru argued in the Constituent Assembly, India's decision vis-à-vis the Commonwealth would have a significant impact on these Indians:

> That is not merely a theoretical question, but a very practical question again in regard to citizenship … it affects the citizenship of all Indians abroad. In the various British colonies exactly what type of relationship we should have which might affect that citizenship; they may not become aliens; all these must be considered.[112]

These issues were being considered by other officials such as Sir B. N. Rau, now Constitutional Adviser to the Constituent Assembly, and Sir Girija Shankar Bajpai, Secretary-General of the Ministry of External Affairs and Commonwealth Relations. Rau and Bajpai focused on the ways in which the British Nationality bill's provisions regarding citizenship would impact Indians and the notion of citizenship within the Commonwealth – discussions that shaped a paper titled 'Citizenship in the British

---

[110] See Anita Inder Singh, 'Keeping India in the Commonwealth: British Political and Military Aims, 1947-49,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 20, no. 3 (1985): 469-481 and Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography, Vol 2, 1947-56* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1979), 46

[111] Chapter 2 will explore these citizenship frameworks in great detail.

[112] Nehru speech at constituent assembly, 8 March 1948, *SWJN,* Second Series, Vol 5, (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1987)

Commonwealth of Nations' that Rau presented at the International Bar Association's conference of the legal profession in August 1948.[113] Even as it raised concerns regarding some of the features of the bill, particularly the status of Indian residents of the princely states as 'British protected persons', the paper nevertheless articulated a hope that the 'Commonwealth will … strive for the federal ideal of having a common citizenship with no arbitrary discrimination between the citizens of one unit and those of another' and facilitate 'a sense of genuine equality among the members'. Rau was even more ambitious, drawing on the example of the Commonwealth's unique relationship with Ireland to suggest that many other states that did not belong to the Commonwealth and had no historical connection to Britain could become 'associate states'. That is, they could 'come to an agreement with the countries of the Commonwealth whereby on the one hand, the citizens of the associate state would be treated as citizens of the Commonwealth in those countries and on the other, citizens of the Commonwealth would be given a corresponding status in the associate state.'[114] Such an arrangement would allow the states to protect their sovereignty and be 'completely independent in every other respect', while benefiting from the 'common citizenship' link. The conference went on to adopt this suggestion in a rather remarkable resolution:

> That in order to promote tolerance and good neighbourliness among the people of different countries, as many of these as possible should secure by mutual agreement and other appropriate means that the citizens of one country shall, while residing or sojourning in another, have the incidents of citizenship of the latter and that this Conference would welcome as an example any arrangement whereby the incidents of Commonwealth citizenship under the British Nationality Act could become available, on a reciprocal basis and under agreed conditions, to the citizens of countries outside the Commonwealth.[115]

As Rau pointed out, this was very much in tune with the preamble of the UN charter and could only be accomplished if 'as many countries as possible in the world could agree that they would not treat each other's citizens as foreigners.'[116] This was, in many ways, India's main objective in putting forth 'reciprocity of citizenship' or 'common citizenship' as the basis of its Commonwealth membership, thereby seeking to ensure

---

[113] At the time, this legislation was still a bill before the British parliament; Correspondence between G. S. Bajpai and B. N. Rau, July 8-9, 1948, B. N. Rau Papers (II Installment), Sub-file no 5, NMML

[114] Rau, *India's Constitution in the Making*, 341.

[115] Rau, *India's Constitution in the Making*, 341.

[116] Rau, *India's Constitution in the Making*, 341

that Indians in colonial territories and Commonwealth nations would not be treated as foreigners. Krishna Menon would reiterate these themes in his letter to Nehru ahead of his visit to London to attend the Commonwealth Prime Ministers conference of October 1948 – incidentally the first Commonwealth conference where the Prime Ministers of India, Pakistan and Ceylon were represented.[117] Considering the options available for India's 'organic' relationship with Britain and the Commonwealth in future, Menon argued against any suggestions of a treaty: 'until India is in reality a great power … on level with the other party to a treaty, the equality of status of the two parties will not necessarily mean equality in action.' Menon's suggestion was instead a comparatively less binding relationship that would take advantage of the 'family arrangement', even as he acknowledged that this phrase 'obviously does not suit us and cannot be used in public discussion … but is the right approach in negotiation.'[118] Menon's interpretation of the family metaphor as a terminology best reiterated among Anglicised bureaucrats and politicians but unspeakable in public, points to the notion that certain elite Indians were far more capable of understanding and belonging to the 'Commonwealth family' than others – a narrative that permeates the Indian state's regulation of 'unskilled' Indian mobility and migration to Britain, as we will see in Chapters 4 and 5 in particular.

Defining this 'family' relationship in legal terms while avoiding allegiance to the traditional common basis of the Commonwealth family – the Crown – was however the immediate challenge. Menon's solution lay in the conception of 'common citizenship' as the definitive link within the family, which would 'ease the Crown problem too, if we agree not to argue it much at present but leave it to students of jurisprudence for future speculation!'. This common citizenship could take the form of 'Commonwealth Citizenship' as defined by the BNA 'to which we at present subscribe and indeed in the passing of which in its present form we materially contributed' and could be incorporated in Indian 'nationality law.'[119] Menon even envisioned a relationship where the Crown would make the President of India his representative to 'assume the protection' of other Commonwealth citizens when in India, and reciprocally, the President would request the Crown to guarantee the protection of Indian nationals in Commonwealth countries, 'again by virtue of the Commonwealth citizenship.'[120]

[117] This letter to Nehru marked 'Strictly Personal and Secret' is undated (although most definitely before the Commonwealth Prime Ministers conference of October 1948), J. N. (S. G.), file no 15(I), NMML

[118] Menon to Nehru, undated letter, J. N. (S. G.), file no 15(I), NMML

[119] Menon to Nehru, undated letter, J. N. (S. G.), file no 15(I), NMML

[120] Menon to Nehru, undated letter, J. N. (S. G.), file no 15(I), NMML

Crucially, he was crystal clear in spelling out the reason for this suggestion of reciprocal citizenship:

> To us, apart from the defence and political considerations set forth; there is the problem of some 9 million Indians in the British colonial areas. They present a great problem. Their only future is in identifying themselves with the lands that gave them birth or gave them a home and to join with all the rest that do the same. They can do this only on the basis of a common citizenship. The arrangement proposed alone can give them the common citizenship without making them aliens in India or without other complications. [121]

At the Commonwealth Prime Ministers conference, meanwhile, Nehru informally discussed India's impending decision regarding its membership with British ministers and other Premiers. Ideas of a 'vague bond'[122] were by then taking clearer shape: as Nehru wrote to Patel, 'this link might be on basis of Commonwealth nationality on reciprocal footing. This would involve India in dual nationality which is rather novel.'[123] Indeed, the very consideration of this option was a rather remarkable shift from India's stand thus far against dual nationality – largely due to grave concerns expressed by countries like Burma, Malaya and Ceylon about the 'loyalty' of Indian communities settled there – and served to reiterate the unique character of the British colonial and Commonwealth realm. Indian officials were positive about the discussions at the conference: as Sir G. S. Bajpai pointed out, the public statement of the conference spoke of a 'Commonwealth of Nations' rather than the 'British Commonwealth' and was a 'concession to the sentiments of members like India … a recognition of the fact that the Community of Nations is no longer British in tradition, civilisation and race.'[124] Upon their return to India, Nehru, Bajpai and Rau put together the first major draft memo stipulating the terms of India's membership of the Commonwealth, sending it to Attlee on 28 October 1948.[125]

This draft memo is striking in its overriding emphasis on citizenship and reciprocity as the basis of India's new relationship with the Commonwealth – perhaps unsurprisingly

---

[121] Menon to Nehru, undated letter, J. N. (S. G.), file no 15(I), NMML

[122] Note by Nehru, 12.9.48, J. N. (S. G.) File 13(I) 'Note on Foreign Policy in relation to the forthcoming session of the general assembly of the United Nations', NMML

[123] Telegram from Nehru to Patel, 18.10.48, J. N. (S. G.) file no 14, NMML

[124] Undated note by G. S. Bajpai, 'Prime Ministers' Conference, London – October 1948', J. N. (S. G.) file no 14, NMML

[125] Memo from Nehru to Attlee, 28.10.48, J. N. (S. G.) file no 14, NMML

so given the longstanding resonance of these themes in Indian diplomatic discourse, as we have seen. The memo noted that India could provide the legal basis for Commonwealth citizenship by adopting either in its Constitution or a 'separate nationality act passed contemporaneously' the relevant provisions of the BNA 'which will have the effect of making Indian nationals Commonwealth citizens, and the nationals of any Commonwealth country Commonwealth citizens when they are in India … on a reciprocal basis.'[126] Commonwealth countries would not be treated as foreign states and their citizens would not be treated as foreigners. In effect, particularly in the case of commercial treaties, this would mean that 'for the purposes of the 'Most Favoured Nation (MFN) clause, the Commonwealth countries are in a special position and are not regarded as Foreign states.'[127] The assertion of 'un-foreignness' therefore had considerable economic consequences, enabling Commonwealth nations to evade the prospect of being included within the MFN framework for 'foreign' nations that would potentially extend the advantages of imperial preference to those beyond the Commonwealth.[128]

Moreover, the Indian memo argued that the complexity over the status of the King could be resolved by making the King the 'First Citizen' who would be the 'fountain of the honour' of the Commonwealth as a whole. Drawing on Menon's version, it envisioned that the President of India would act on behalf of the King to fulfil the obligations of the Crown towards non-Indian Commonwealth citizens in India. Equally fascinating are the memo's plans for reciprocity of diplomatic representation: 'In foreign states where the Indian govt has no representation, it will be at liberty to make use of any other Commonwealth country's Ambassador or Minister; and the Indian govt will be willing to provide reciprocal facilities for any other Commonwealth govt that so desires.'[129]

Having heard of India's new terms of membership, Dominion representatives communicated 'in friendliest spirit' the 'strength of sentiment' in their countries for the King which could not be assuaged by naming him 'First Citizen'. As a compromise, they urged Nehru to consider the possibility that the authority to appoint Heads of Missions be derived from the King.[130] Nehru, who now faced the task of presenting India's case

[126] Memo from Nehru to Attlee, 28.10.48, J. N. (S. G.) file no 14, NMML
[127] Memo from Nehru to Attlee, 28.10.48, J. N. (S. G.) file no 14, NMML
[128] See Francine McKenzie, *Redefining the Bonds of Commonwealth, 1939–1948: The Politics of Preference* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) and Donal K. Coffey, "The Right to Shoot Himself': Secession in the British Commonwealth of Nations', *The Journal of Legal History*, 39, no. 2 (2018), 117-139.
[129] Memo sent by Nehru to Attlee, 28.10.48, J. N. (SG) file no 14, NMML
[130] Telegram from GS Bajpai to Nehru, 18/19 Nov 1948, J. N. (S. G.), file no 15(1), NMML

for membership of the Commonwealth to the Congress party, Cabinet and Constituent Assembly, doubted that this proposal would be accepted. 'Even reference to King being Fountain of Honour is not liked' by the cabinet, he noted.[131] Nehru argued that while India would not pledge allegiance to the Crown, he saw 'no reason why other Dominions should eliminate King as link … As King of Commonwealth he would remain as King of particular Dominions and at the same time First citizen of Commonwealth.'[132] In the cabinet discussions, criticism was directed even at the slightest infringements on India's sovereignty: there were suggestions that there be no reference to the King or the Indian independence act, and that provisions about Commonwealth citizenship be contained in a separate nationality act and not the Constitution. There was also fear that 'this new arrangement might lead to some discrimination in favour of Britishers etc, in regard to commercial and economic relations..' and there 'appeared to be some hesitation and suspicion as to what all these might lead us to.'[133]

Even as Nehru dealt with criticism from his colleagues about what they perceived as the excessive concessions given to the Commonwealth, Attlee informed Nehru that his Law Officers viewed the memo as insufficient. While the British were keen to assist them in 'every way', they found the memo inadequate from a 'purely legal point of view.'[134] In their view, while the consideration of the King 'as the fountain of honour … would be of assistance', only a common allegiance to the Crown was a legally sound basis for Britain to recognise a country as 'not foreign.'[135] Britain, they claimed, would not be able to justify giving India MFN treatment on the basis outlined in the Indian memo and if they did, this might lead to claims from 'entirely foreign countries' for the privileges of MFN status. Moreover, they did not view India's preferred term of 'First Citizen' as appropriate for the King, citing that Dominion representatives did not prefer this term since they considered the Prime Minister to be the first citizen of each Commonwealth country.[136] Attlee was not keen on the terminology of 'First Citizen' either: as Menon recalled later, he apparently exclaimed, 'Oh no! First Citizen, that sounds like

[131] Telegram from Nehru to Krishna Menon, 19.11.48, J. N. (S. G.), file no 15(1), NMML
[132]Telegram from Nehru to Menon, 19.11.48, J. N. (S. G.), file no 15(1), NMML
[133] Letter from Nehru to Menon, 16.11.48, J. N. (S. G.), file no 15(1), NMML
[134] Message from Attlee to Nehru, 19.11.48, J. N. (S. G.), file no 14, NMML
[135] Summary of opinion referred to in personal message from the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of India, 22.11.48, J. N. (S. G.), file no 15(1), NMML
[136] Summary of opinion referred to in personal message from the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of India, 22.11.48, J. N. (S. G.), file no 15(1), NMML

Robespierre … and it would not go down.'[137] Many Indian politicians too had expressed their reservations about recognising the King as First Citizen, albeit for completely different reasons. Their objections to the terminology of First Citizen was based on their 'deeprooted objections … to anything which even remotely indicates some kind of subordinate status of India or India's President.'[138]

India's call for a common citizenship as the basis of membership was also considered insufficient from the UK perspective, since the 'practical differences' between Commonwealth countries meant that the treatment of Commonwealth citizens varied from one country to another. [139] Attlee suggested that India overcome these legal hurdles by issuing a declaration that they are 'bound in a special form of association within the Commonwealth' and supplementing Commonwealth citizenship with a link of 'real substance' – that is, the King.[140] Both Nehru and Menon reiterated that India would not accept the Crown as link, with the latter noting that 'Attlee should regard this matter as a political and commonsense one as we do and not as a matter of legalisms.'[141] In Menon's view, the problem therefore stemmed from the fact that British legal opinion conceived of only two categories of relationships: Dominions and foreign states. As he recalled years later, Foreign Office lawyers had indeed argued that 'there is no such thing as a Commonwealth Citizen.'[142] India sought to redefine this binary by calling for the recognition of a third intermediate category: that of a Commonwealth state which was neither a Dominion nor a foreign state. Attlee meanwhile was still pressing India to recognize the 'stability' and 'mystique' of the Crown: a tired Nehru reiterated, 'you will appreciate that the mystique you refer to would hardly be applicable to India.'[143]

There was however increasing debate over words and phrases that would redefine the terms of membership of the Commonwealth. Given the widespread disapproval of the term 'First Citizen' from both British officials and Dominion representatives – not to mention criticism in India of this title – Nehru clarified that India had 'no desire to retain

[137] See Menon's interview with Michael Brecher in Michael Brecher, *India and World Politics: Krishna Menon's View of the World.* (New York: Praeger, 1968), 22
[138] Letter from Nehru to Menon, 28.11.48, J. N. (S. G.), file no 15(2), NMML
[139] Summary of opinion referred to in personal message from the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of India, 22.11.48, J. N. (S. G.), file no 15(1), NMML
[140] Letter from Attlee to Nehru, 20.11.48, J. N. (S. G.), file no 15(1), NMML
[141] Telegram from Menon to Nehru, 29.11.48, J. N. (S. G.) file no 15 (2), NMML
[142] Brecher, *India and World Politics,* 25
[143] Letter from Nehru to Attlee, 1.4.49, J. N. (S. G.), file no 22(1), NMML

it.'[144] Yet, Indian officials neither preferred the terminology of 'Head of the Commonwealth' or even the 'British Commonwealth of Nations'. Nehru instead suggested drawing on the Statute of Westminster to describe the King as the 'symbol of the free association of the members of the Commonwealth.'[145] Preparing for the Commonwealth Prime Ministers conference to be held from 22 April 1949, Indian officials compiled drafts of the points of agreement and a proposed declaration to be made at the conference. These drafts were closely based not just on the Statute of Westminster but also the report of the Imperial conference of 1946: as Nehru argued, 'using this language … has a certain advantage and points to continuity.' The draft points of agreement referred to the King as 'the symbol of this association', called for a Commonwealth citizenship and suggested that the British Commonwealth of Nations be renamed the 'Commonwealth of Free Nations.'[146] India's draft declaration, perhaps even more radically, spoke of a 'Commonwealth of Free and independent nations, voluntarily associated, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic and external affairs.' Most importantly, it identified 'the King … (as) symbol of this free association, a common citizenship another mark of its uniqueness.'[147]

The 'London declaration' eventually issued by the conference differed from these drafts in significant ways, although it did include some of India's preferred terminology. The declaration recognized the King as the 'symbol of the free association of its independent member nations and *as such* the Head of the Commonwealth', with Nehru giving in and accepting the term 'Head of the Commonwealth' even as India's preferred phrase identifying him as the 'symbol of the free association' was adopted. There was much disagreement over the terminology to refer to the King before they had settled on the words 'as such' – allegedly Menon's suggestion – so as to dilute the perceived allegiance pledged to the King by this declaration. As Menon would later recall, 'the King at one time said to me in jest, 'What am I now – As Such'?'[148]

In a neat compromise, the declaration used the designation of the 'British Commonwealth of Nations' in the first instance referring to the existing situation, while every subsequent reference termed it 'Commonwealth of Nations' instead. Conspicuous

[144] Cable from Nehru to Menon, 2 Dec 1948, *SWJN*, Second Series, Vol 8 (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1989).
[145] Letter from Nehru to Menon, 14 April 1949, *SWJN*, Second Series, Vol 10 (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1990).
[146] Letter from Nehru to Krishna Menon, 14.4.49, J. N. (S. G.), file no 22(2), NMML
[147] Letter from Nehru to Krishna Menon, 14.4.49, J. N. (S. G.), file no 22(2), NMML
[148] Brecher, *India and World Politics*, 24

by its absence, however, was any reference to Commonwealth citizenship in the declaration itself, although this was mentioned in the minutes of the conference – perhaps unsurprising in some ways given the immigration policies of the white Dominions.[149] However, the minutes called on each member of the Commonwealth to ensure 'that nationals of other member nations are not treated as foreigners.'[150] Despite its exclusion from the declaration, the principle of reciprocity was nominally accepted – as we shall see in Chapter 2, debates over reciprocal or Commonwealth citizenship for Indians would long continue. Tinker has perceptively argued that this essentially cemented the fact that while there would be 'full-equality of status' for the nation-states as members of the Commonwealth, this would not extend to the black and brown peoples of these member-states.[151] India had essentially called the bluff of equality in the Commonwealth, and had been met with a nominal status of citizenship. Moreover, as the British noted, 'it was also never clear how far the Indian govt itself would give preferential treatment to Commonwealth citizens from other member countries over foreigners in terms of right of entry and deportation.'[152] Indeed there had been considerable criticism in India against the idea of 'Commonwealth citizenship'. Perhaps its most famous critic was Dr B. R. Ambedkar, Chairman of the drafting committee of the Indian Constitution. Ambedkar had argued not just that a Republican India was incompatible with the Commonwealth, but also that accepting allegiance to the King would be a comparatively 'less dangerous' course of action than the notion of Commonwealth citizenship which could hamper the 'economic independence of India … taking away the liberty of India to protect her nationals against Commonwealth citizens.'[153]

The dawn of a 'new' Commonwealth was met with a range of reactions. Stafford Cripps wrote to Nehru in emotional, glowing terms: 'I am very happy and believe that you have done something really big in world history … We have been given this chance to work together – not always seeing eye to eye – but always working heart to heart.'[154] Menon later recalled that Churchill had been greatly moved too: 'tears rolled from his eyes … To him, India remaining in was as if the prodigal had come home or something of that

[149] For Lester Pearson's 'misgivings' regarding reciprocal citizenship, see Tinker, *Separate and Unequal*, 385
[150] Cable from Nehru to Sardar Patel, 26 April 1949, *SWJN,* Second Series, Vol 10
[151] Cable from Nehru to Sardar Patel, 26 April 1949, *SWJN,* Second Series, Vol 10
[152] See Karatani, *Defining British Citizenship*, 125
[153] B. R. Ambedkar, *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol 17, Part 2*, (New Delhi: Dr. Ambedkar Foundation, 2014), 373
[154] Letter from Stafford Cripps to Nehru, 28.4.49, J. N. (S. G.) File 22 (2), NMML

kind.'[155] B. N. Rau meanwhile noted that India had not changed its stance or abandoned Republican status: instead, 'it is rather the Commonwealth that has changed.'[156]

CONCLUSION

We have explored the range of responses and critiques that Nehru encountered at the Constituent Assembly upon his return, particularly regarding the impact of India's membership of the Commonwealth on the status of overseas Indians. This was hardly unexpected: indeed Nehru had long prepared to counter such assertions with the narrative of 'Commonwealth citizenship' as the basis of India's Commonwealth membership. Yet this was not a framework that lent itself to easy definition: seeking to describe 'Commonwealth citizenship', Nehru admitted that it was perhaps better to talk of it in vague terms. That is, it would mean that the peoples of Commonwealth countries 'were not completely foreign to one another … that un-foreignness remains.'[157] This vagueness had its own benefits in assuaging the concerns of those who worried that such frameworks of 'common' citizenship would infringe on the sovereignty of India. Indeed as Ananthasayanam Ayyangar, member of the Constituent Assembly, noted:

> When there were some rumours that there would be a common or dual citizenship established, I felt a little nervous. What kind of citizenship would it be, and what commitments and obligations would be put on our country, these we could not envisage. But now I have a sense of relief. There is no such dual citizenship, and no commitment whatsoever. We are absolutely free.[158]

This conflict between sovereignty and wider conceptions of citizenship would be a definitive theme in India's drafting of its own citizenship framework, as we shall see in the next chapter. While it may be tempting to view 'reciprocity' as a cynical, largely terminological tool employed by Indian officials in order to mollify criticism back home, the persistence of 'reciprocity' from the imperial conference's reciprocity resolutions to the Commonwealth conception of reciprocity of citizenship suggests a different narrative. The widespread discrimination encountered by Indians in the international realm both before and after 1947 made it by default an issue that Indian diplomacy could

---

[155] Brecher, *India and world politics*, 26

[156] Rau, *India's Constitution in the Making*, 354

[157] CAI debates, Vol. 8, 16 May 1949
Available at http://cadindia.clpr.org.in/constitution_assembly_debates/volume/8/1949-05-16

[158] Ananthasayanam Ayyangar, CAI debates, Vol. 8, 16 May 1949
http://cadindia.clpr.org.in/constitution_assembly_debates/volume/8/1949-05-16

not ignore – indeed, as one writer had noted in 1945, 'the very mention of the subject of "Indians abroad" raises in India a unique resentment, for it affects the self-respect and dignity of India as a nation.'[159]

Far from just the emotional salience of the issue, India's calls for overseas Indians to identify themselves with their country of residence were considerably complicated by the fact that many of these nations were drafting citizenship legislation explicitly aimed at excluding Indians. In this context, 'reciprocity of citizenship' – with all its limitations – was a significant means of drawing on India's sovereign status to call on other sovereign nations, particularly those within the Commonwealth 'family', to protect the rights of Indian nationals and ensure their 'un-foreignness'. In so doing, it therefore attempted to provide the rights of citizenship without infringing on sovereignty: indeed, as Menon later recalled, this idea for a common citizenship was not 'in the sense of a United States but that we should not be alien to each other … there should be a distinction between aliens and Commonwealth citizens.'[160] In other words, Nehru's longstanding concern about the treatment of Indians who were 'non-nationals' could not be left to chance, in the hope that other countries would freely embrace the sanctity of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[161] 'Reciprocity of citizenship' within the 'new' Commonwealth was the other alternative that India pursued – with considerable consequences for its overseas communities, as we shall see in the coming chapters.

[159] Chandrasekhar, 'The Emigration and Status of Indians in the British Empire,' 152

[160] See Brecher, *India and world politics*, 22

[161] Bhagavan, 'A New Hope,' 341

2

ENTANGLED CITIZENS

OVERSEAS INDIANS AND THE MAKING OF INDIAN CITIZENSHIP

'Is a man born in India a British subject?'
'How is such a man a 'subject' if India is a Republic?'
'Is such a man treated as an Alien in the United Kingdom?'

In June 1954, an exasperated official from the British embassy in Washington D.C sought clarification regarding three questions that were frequently asked by several bureaucrats ranging from State Department officials to staff at the New Zealand embassy. Forwarding the message to officials at the Commonwealth Relations Office, D. J. C. Crawley ventured his guesses: 'The answers to the three questions … are probably 'yes', 'just one of those illogical things' and 'no'.'[1] This deceptively succinct exchange is an important indicator of both the complexity of negotiating identities shaped by Empire and the bureaucratic haze of interpreting overlapping citizenship frameworks. Indian officials for their part were concerned with defining the answer to another succinct question: 'Who is an Indian citizen?' This seemingly simple question was a great dilemma for Indian officials as they set out to draft a framework for Indian citizenship, a process that took more than eight years to complete and remained a subject of debate long afterwards. The making of this 'eternal file'[2] was in no small part due to the intricacies of reconciling Indian citizenship legislation with the provisions of the 1948 British Nationality Act (BNA) which delineated Indians as British subjects or Commonwealth Citizens after independence.

Departing from conventional understandings of Indian citizenship that view it either solely in terms of Partition or as a mechanism through which the Indian state distanced its diaspora, I read Indian citizenship as the product of a complex, even paradoxical negotiation of entangled identities shaped by Empire – a process informed by the

[1] Letter from D. J. C. Crawley to R. C. Ormerod, 11.6.54, DO35/6387, 'Indian citizenship legislation', The National Archives at Kew (TNA hereafter)
[2] Letter from Y. D. Gundevia to Subimal Dutt, 16.1.51, File 45-1/49-UK, 'Indian Citizenship Bill-Consideration Of', National Archives of India, New Delhi (NAI hereafter)

widespread crises of citizenship encountered by overseas Indians. Indeed the BNA had longstanding consequences for those Indians resident in Commonwealth countries and British colonial territories, producing what I term 'entangled citizens': overseas Indians who were potentially eligible for multiple claims to citizenship and yet whose claims were often contested by all countries involved. The difficulty of unraveling these claims was exemplified by the pervasive confusion over what terminologies to use to describe these persons: were they 'Indians', 'overseas Indians', 'British subjects', 'Commonwealth citizens' or 'citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies' – or indeed perhaps something else altogether? As one British official noted, the complexity of defining such a legal status and implementing unwieldy citizenship frameworks was akin to opening a Pandora's box.[3]

My focus on the centrality of overseas Indians to the making of Indian citizenship is an effort to go beyond binary narratives of the Indian state's inclusion or exclusion of its diaspora at the stroke of independence. I argue instead that there is more to be gained by interrogating the Indian state's seemingly contradictory yet continual engagement with its overseas communities – for instance, calling on them to identify with their countries of residence, while still enabling provisions to register them as Indian citizens in India's diplomatic missions. I will show that these seemingly paradoxical actions can be best understood as a process through which India sought to ensure that its overseas communities had citizenship rights – not necessarily *Indian* citizenship. That is, while Indian citizenship would be available for those of whom this was the only option, Indian officials firmly regarded the acquisition of 'local' citizenship of their countries of domicile – if available – to be a far more effective guarantor against discrimination. Indeed, as we have seen in chapter one, this was very much in line with India's call for reciprocal rights and citizenship within the Commonwealth – precisely aimed at ensuring the availability of some form of citizenship framework for its overseas communities. This did not however always take effective shape, particularly given the bureaucratic complexities of interpreting and implementing overlapping citizenship frameworks and indeed the fact that the process of registering citizens often empowered the biases of individual officials.

[3] A. N. G. Bone to E. R. G. Kidd, 19.11.59, File DO 35/10294, 'Indian Citizenship Act: renunciation and automatic loss of Indian citizenship', TNA

THE CENTRALITY OF OVERSEAS INDIANS

A diverse literature has explored the legislation, everyday practice and performance of postcolonial Indian citizenship after Partition.[4] Examining the ways in which the 'relationship of individuals to the state'[5] and the 'terms of membership'[6] of the new Indian union were delineated, scholars have focused on the centrality of Partition to shaping uneven discourses on citizenship: producing 'minority-citizens' as the integral 'others' to notions of the Hindu upper caste male as the 'natural citizen'.[7] Going beyond the high politics of Constituent Assembly and Parliamentary debates on citizenship, a strand of this scholarship has also focused on the spectacular and banal ways in which the 'everyday' state was encountered by the citizen in the aftermath of Partition.[8] While there is no doubt that ideas of nationhood, sovereignty and citizenship were significantly shaped by Partition[9], there is also a need to recognise the fact that drafting Indian citizenship legislation necessarily meant engaging with the multiple possibilities of citizenship and nationality shaped by the BNA.

Innovative recent scholarship has also departed from conventional interpretations of citizenship-making as a largely domestic process, focusing instead on how 'foreign policy becomes central to our understanding of modern citizenship.'[10] The relationship of the postcolonial Indian state to 'overseas Indians' is crucial to this debate: a dynamic often explained through a somewhat linear narrative where the 'expansive transnationalism'[11]

---

[4] Notable examples of this vast scholarship include Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), Haimanti Roy, *Partitioned Lives: Migrants, Refugees, Citizens in India and Pakistan, 1947–1965* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: the Making of India and Pakistan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), Ornit Shani, *How India Became Democratic: Citizenship and the Making of the Universal Franchise*, (New Delhi: Penguin Random House, 2018), Srirupa Roy, *Beyond Belief: India and the Politics of Postcolonial nationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), Joya Chatterji, 'South Asian Histories of Citizenship, 1946–1970,' *Historical Journal*, 55 (2012): 1049-1071.

[5] Niraja Gopal Jayal, *Citizenship and its Discontents: An Indian History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 12.

[6] Anupama Roy, 'Between encompassment and closure: The 'migrant' and the citizen in India,' *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 42, no. 2 (2008): 219

[7] Gyanendra Pandey, 'Can a Muslim be an Indian?', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 41, no. 4 (1999): 608. For a similar argument, see Jayal, *Citizenship and its Discontents*, 53

[8] Taylor C. Sherman, William Gould, and Sarah Ansari, eds, 'From subjects to citizens: society and the everyday state in India and Pakistan, 1947–1970', Special issue, *Modern Asian Studies*, 45, no. 1 (2011)

[9] See Niraja Gopal Jayal, 'Citizenship,' in *The Oxford Handbook of the Indian Constitution,* eds, Sujit Choudhury, Madhav Khosla and Pratap Bhanu Mehta (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016), 163.

[10] Itty Abraham, *How India Became Territorial: Foreign Policy, Diaspora, Geopolitics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 17. Also see Sankaran Krishna, *Postcolonial Insecurities: India, Sri Lanka, and the Question of Nationhood* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999)

[11] Latha Varadarajan, *The Domestic Abroad: Diasporas in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 52.

of a 'global' Indian nation[12] was replaced by the territorializing postcolonial state's exclusion of the diaspora after independence – until the neoliberal state's rapprochement of sorts much later on in the 1990s, spurred by the economic successes of the Indian diaspora.[13] For Abraham, India's 'volte-face' vis-à-vis the diaspora happened 'overnight', a decision taken 'at the moment of independence' to mollify concerns expressed by neighbouring countries about an expansionist India aided by its diaspora acting as a 'fifth column'.[14]Varadarajan too argues that the territorialization of the Indian state after independence and the 'ideological commitment of the new Indian leadership to anticolonial struggle' shaped its lackadaisical response to the crises faced by overseas Indians in Ceylon and Burma after 1947.[15] Most importantly however, she makes a brief mention of the seeming oddities that contradict widespread notions of a clean break between the Indian state and its overseas populations:

> *Strangely enough*, India continued negotiations with Ceylon and Burma over decades … set up rehabilitation schemes for those Indians who did come back, and consistently raised the issue of the treatment of Indians in places like South Africa and Fiji in fora like the UN and the Commonwealth. To that extent, the postindependence Indian state was still concerned with the status of overseas Indians.[16]

I argue that these seemingly inexplicable instances are more than exceptions to the clear cut norm of the Indian state's distance from its diaspora; indeed they exemplify the complex, paradoxical, even messy yet *continual* engagement between the Indian state and overseas Indians. First, it is essential to reiterate the fact that 'overseas Indians' were not a homogenous category. Indian officials were highly aware of the fact that 'the number of Indians resident in Commonwealth countries, particularly Ceylon, Federation of Malaya, UK and its colonies, is much larger than in other countries.'[17] This was, as we have seen in Chapter 1, an important factor in India's negotiation of Commonwealth membership through terms of 'reciprocity of citizenship' as a means of pushing for the

---

[12] Abraham, *How India Became Territorial*, 74.

[13] See Abraham, *How India Became Territorial*, 70. While their interpretation of the class and caste dynamics of diaspora and Indian foreign policy is probing and insightful, Abraham and Varadarajan exemplify this somewhat linear narrative.

[14] Abraham, *How India Became Territorial,* 70 and 74.

[15] Varadarajan, *The Domestic Abroad*, 69.

[16] Varadarajan, *The Domestic Abroad*, 69. Italics added.

[17] Note from Fateh Singh, 16.11.59, File 21(26) – PVI/60 'Reacquisition of Indian citizenship by Indians in Malaya', MEA (PVI Section), NAI

rights of overseas Indians within the realm of British colonies and Commonwealth nations. This realm was also integral to the making of postcolonial Indian diplomacy, wherein India articulated its claim to diplomatic status on the basis of 'representing' significant Indian populations in colonial territories – again in stark contrast to notions of 'distance' from the diaspora.[18]

Second, the focus on moments of crisis in the 1970s and 1980s as proof of India's exclusion of the diaspora after independence hides more than it reveals. While Abraham points to India's response to the Ugandan Asian crisis as exemplifying the 'practice of bracketing the diaspora from territorial India' that defined foreign policy, right down to the 1990s, this ignores the long prelude to such moments of upheaval that involved considerable diplomatic negotiations over the question of citizenship.[19] Third, these works focusing on the exclusion of overseas Indians from Indian citizenship pay surprisingly minimal attention to the making of the first full-fledged framework for Indian citizenship: the Indian Citizenship Act of 1955.[20] Finally, the oft-used explanation that India called on overseas Indians to identify themselves with their countries of residence neither meant that citizenship of these countries was easily available to overseas Indians nor that the Indian government did not engage with this issue any further. As I will show, the Indian Citizenship Act's negotiation of the BNA's expansive citizenship provisions offers valuable insights into the Indian state and its relationship vis-à-vis its overseas communities in British colonies and Commonwealth nations.

The 1948 British Nationality Act provided for British subject or Commonwealth citizen status through the 'gateway' of local citizenship, making Indians 'British subjects without citizenship' until the 1955 Indian act was passed. This was far more complicated in the case of overseas Indians who could potentially fall into any of the following categories: Indian citizens, citizens of the newly-minted category of 'United Kingdom and colonies' (UKC) or temporary British subjects without citizenship. This last option was the definitive problem in the case of overseas Indians: if they, as 'temporary British subjects without citizenship', were not included in India's citizenship framework, they would have to be either automatically included into the framework of UKC citizens – a possibility that British officials dreaded – or left stateless. While there is a vast literature on the 1948

[18] I explore this in detail in Chapter 3

[19] Abraham, *How India Became Territorial*, 75.

[20] While the Indian constitution of 1950 had certain provisions regarding citizenship, these were widely regarded as a temporary measure until a citizenship act was framed.

BNA, there is comparatively less focus on its impact on Indian citizenship or the fact that the BNA guaranteed Indians the right to travel to, live and work in the United Kingdom – a remarkable contrast to the widespread discrimination and immigration restrictions encountered by Indians in virtually every other part of the world.[21]

The BNA's provision to open the floodgates for immigration from across the Empire – hard to believe in hindsight – has been the subject of much debate. As Hansen points out, British subject status had existed long before the BNA and given the historically low rates of colonial migration to Britain itself, policymakers were not given to expect the influx that followed after 1948.[22] Moreover, the legislation was less about the question of migration and more about British attempts to wrest back the initiative after Canada's radical changes to the common code through its citizenship legislation.[23] That is, this attempt to reaffirm British subject status as 'a globally intertwined fellowship'[24] while recognizing national frameworks of citizenship was a means 'to redress the fading image of Britain's imperial legacy through the institutionalization of a transracial, transregional citizenship category that bolstered the perception of imperial and Commonwealth uniformity.'[25]

With the exception of Hugh Tinker's work, the BNA's far-ranging consequences for the contours of South Asian citizenship frameworks have only recently received some attention.[26] In her nuanced work on the ways in which Indian diplomats sought to – in effect – perform Partition vis-à-vis Indian communities in British colonial territories,

---

[21] A range of fascinating perspectives on the 1948 BNA include Andrew Mycock, 'British Citizenship and the Legacy of Empires,' *Parliamentary Affairs,* 63, no. 2 (2010): 339 – 355, Kathleen Paul, '"British Subjects" and "British Stock": Labour's Postwar Imperialism,' *Journal of British Studies*, 34, no. 2 (1995): 233 – 276, Randall Hansen, 'The politics of citizenship in 1940s Britain: the British nationality act,' *Twentieth Century British History,* 10 (1999): 67–95, Sarah Ansari, 'Subjects or Citizens? India, Pakistan and the 1948 British Nationality Act,' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 41, no. 2 (2013): 285–312, Rieko Karatani, *Defining British Citizenship: Empire, Commonwealth and Modern Britain* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), Kennetta Hammond Perry, *London is the Place for Me: Black Britons, Citizenship and the Politics of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016)

[22] Hansen, 'The Politics of Citizenship in 1940s Britain', 88-90. Hugh Tinker also makes a similar point- See Hugh Tinker, *Separate and Unequal: India and Indians in the British Commonwealth*, *1920-1950*, (London: C. Hurst & Co, 1976), 356.

[23] See Jatinder Mann, 'The evolution of Commonwealth citizenship, 1945 – 48 in Canada, Britain and Australia,' *Comparative Politics*, 50, no. 3 (2012): 293 – 313.

[24] See Stuart James Ward, *Untied Kingdom: A World History of the End of Britain* (forthcoming, Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[25] Perry, *London is the Place for Me*, 58.

[26] While Tinker's account offers valuable material regarding the status of Indians in British colonies between 1920-1950 and the significance of the BNA, it only briefly refers to the 1955 Indian Citizenship Act.

Deborah Sutton has shown the strict criteria utilised by officials such as Apa Pant, Indian Commissioner in East Africa to separate what he termed 'the wheat … from the chaff' and register the 'right' kind of overseas Indian as an Indian citizen.[27] This was a process through which Indian officials found these overseas communities wanting in many ways, be it in terms of asserting their secular credentials, deemed mandatory for Indian citizenship, or their anticolonial spirit.[28] Joya Chatterji has argued that the Indian government's increasing push for overseas Indians obtaining the citizenship of their countries of residence was due also to the fact that 'this would allow India to sidestep the sticky question of who, among these 3 million-odd people abroad, was entitled to Indian citizenship; who among them was a 'closet' Pakistani and whom it was safe to allow back to India.'[29] While Sutton and Chatterji briefly mention both the 1948 British Nationality Act and the 1955 Indian citizenship act, they do not focus on the ways in which drafting Indian citizenship legislation in lieu of the provisions of the BNA impacted the citizenship status of overseas Indians.

It is Sarah Ansari's work that clearly showcases the 'bureaucratic tangle' of reconciling the BNA with citizenship legislation formulated in India and Pakistan.[30] While her focus is more on Pakistani citizenship legislation (which preceded the 1955 Indian citizenship act by four years) and the complexities encountered by the British missions in dealing with 'potential Pakistani' citizens abroad, she demonstrates the ways in which the British sought to avoid being what they called 'a dustbin for the refuse discarded by' India and Pakistan.[31] Drawing on this work, I explore the making of the 1955 Indian Citizenship Act and its negotiation of the BNA, showing the ways in which widespread crises of citizenship and statelessness encountered by overseas Indian communities in regions such as Ceylon, Burma etc impacted the making of Indian citizenship.

DELIBERATING CITIZENSHIP IN THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

While a legal framework pertaining to citizenship in detail would take much longer to come into effect, draft provisions regarding citizenship were to be included in the

[27] See Deborah Sutton, 'Divided and Uncertain Loyalties,' *Interventions*, 9, no. 2 (2007): 282.

[28] Sutton, 'Divided and Uncertain Loyalties'. Also see Sutton, 'Imagined sovereignty and the Indian subject: Partition and politics beyond the nation, 1948–1960,' *Contemporary South Asia*, 19, no. 4 (2011): 409-425.

[29] Joya Chatterji, 'From Imperial Subjects to National Citizens: South Asians and the International Migration Regime since 1947,' in *Routledge Handbook of the South Asian Diaspora,* eds, Joya Chatterji and David Washbrook (New York: Routledge, 2013), 183-197. Also see Chatterji, 'South Asian Histories of Citizenship', 1049-1071.

[30] Ansari, 'Subjects or Citizens?,' 292.

[31] Ansari, 'Subjects or Citizens?,' 295.

Constitution and were discussed by the Indian Constituent Assembly in April 1947.[32] These debates touched on the fundamental question of granting citizenship by virtue of birth within the Union (*jus solis*), as opposed to the basis of descent (*jus sanguinis*). This was essentially framed as a clash between a racialised idea of citizenship (*jus sanguinis*) and a more 'civilised', 'democratic' one (*jus solis*). The preference for *jus solis* has been variously identified as an 'inheritance' from British law reflective of 'the legacy of British subjecthood and imperial citizenship'[33] and as a successor of protoconstitutional documents such as the Motilal Nehru Committee Report of 1928 that had similarly provided for citizenship based on the place of birth.[34] Yet it was not without controversy: the fact that citizenship would be granted to all those born in India, regardless of the nationality of their parents, raised considerable concerns in the pre-Partition Constituent Assembly.[35] Members worried that 'European born sons and daughters will seek occupation in state and private services and later they can turn as aliens,'[36] while those born in territories like Sindh that could potentially be a part of Pakistan would not be deemed Indian citizens.[37] For proponents of the *jus soli* conception of citizenship such as Alladi Krishnaswami Aiyyar and Sardar Patel however, such a framework was more suited to the international context within which Indian citizenship was being formulated. That is, such expansive notions were considerably shaped by the position of overseas Indians who were waging many an uphill battle vis-a-vis citizenship. Indeed, Aiyyar pointed this out in as many words:

> I cannot altogether forget the fact that citizenship will carry with it protection in the international field. In dealing with citizenship we have to remember we are fighting against discrimination and all that against South Africa and other States. It is for you to consider whether our conception of citizenship should be universal, or should be racial or should be sectarian.[38]

These stark binaries were repeated by Patel too, who cautioned that 'the provision about

---

[32] For these debates, see Constituent Assembly of India (CAI hereafter), Vol. 3, 28 April-2 May, 1947 http://cadindia.clpr.org.in/constitution_assembly_debates/volume/3

[33] See Chatterji, 'South Asian Histories of Citizenship,' 1053.

[34] Jayal, *Citizenship and its Discontents*, 57.

[35] This excluded the children of foreign diplomats who were not under 'Indian jurisdiction',

[36] Statement by B. Das, 29 April 1947, CAI, Vol. 3.
http://cadindia.clpr.org.in/constitution_assembly_debates/volume/3/1947-04-29

[37] Statement by R. K. Sidhwa, 2 May 1947, CAI, Vol. 3.
http://cadindia.clpr.org.in/constitution_assembly_debates/volume/3/1947-05-02

[38] Statement by Alladi Krishnaswamy Aiyar, 29 April 1947, CAI, Vol 3
http://cadindia.clpr.org.in/constitution_assembly_debates/volume/3/1947-04-29

citizenship will be scrutinised all over the world.'[39] The status of Indians in South Africa – an issue that India had taken to the UN General Assembly less than a year ago – was seen as exemplifying the stakes in this debate. As Patel argued, given that 'we claim for Indians born there South African nationality … it is not right for us to take a narrow view.'[40] The status of overseas Indians was central even to those sceptical of *jus solis* frameworks: as K. N. Katju noted, the citizenship of children born outside India to Indian parents had to be accounted for. Mediating the citizenship of these children beyond the borders of India ought to be, in Katju's view, a significant responsibility of Indian diplomats: 'We are now sending a number of Ambassadors abroad in order to establish contacts with all foreign countries. It would be lamentable if Indian people … go there and (find that) a child born to them (is) … not … treated as an Indian subject.'[41]

A lack of consensus over the citizenship provisions led to the postponement of the debate: by the time the Constituent Assembly reconvened, Partition had been formally announced. This was a definitive event in the making of Indian citizenship: in the words of Jayal, 'the Partition legacy continues to inflect this body of law and jurisprudence … the imprint of this event has become more, rather than less, deeply entrenched with the passage of time.'[42] Indeed discussions regarding the provisions for citizenship at the commencement of the Constitution were now far more volatile, centring around the figures of the 'refugee' and the 'migrant'.[43] While these categories were encoded with problematic religious connotations, they were nevertheless crucial to the 'affirmation of the sovereign identity of the nation.'[44] Even as the context of Partition clearly informed the new amendments to the draft citizenship provisions presented in August 1949, one change in particular was aimed at addressing the complex status of overseas Indians. Extending Indian citizenship to those 'persons who or whose parents or whose grandparents were born in India as defined in the Government of India Act, 1935, who are ordinarily residing in any territory outside India', this provision did not enable automatic access to citizenship but required that overseas Indians register themselves as Indian citizens through the diplomatic and consular representatives of India – a

[39] Statement by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, 29 April 1947, CAI, Vol 3 http://cadindia.clpr.org.in/constitution_assembly_debates/volume/3/1947-04-29
[40] Statement by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, 29 April 1947, CAI, Vol 3 http://cadindia.clpr.org.in/constitution_assembly_debates/volume/3/1947-04-29.
[41] Statement by Kailash Nath Katju, 29 April 1947, CAI, Vol. 3. http://cadindia.clpr.org.in/constitution_assembly_debates/volume/3/1947-04-29.
[42] Jayal, 'Citizenship,' 163.
[43] Jayal, *Citizenship and its Discontents*, 58
[44] Roy, 'Between encompassment and closure,' 225. See also Jayal, *Citizenship and its Discontents*, 58

provision more or less in line with Katju's suggestion.[45] As Nehru asserted in the Constituent Assembly, this was an attempt to address the prickly issue of the exact status and nationality of overseas Indians:

> We have millions of people in foreign parts and other countries. Some of those may be taken to be foreign nationals, although they are Indians in origin. Others still consider themselves to some extent as Indians and yet they have also got some kind of local nationality too, like for instance, in Malaya, Singapore, Fiji and Mauritius. If you deprive them of their local nationality, they become aliens there. So all these difficulties arise and you will see that in this resolution we have tried to provide for them for the time being, leaving the choice to them and also leaving it to our Consul Generals there to register their names.[46]

Yezdezard Dinshaw Gundevia, the Indian diplomat posted in Burma at the time, writes in his memoirs that the inclusion of this new clause was in a significant part due to his intervention to address the potential statelessness of Indians in Burma.[47] Gundevia describes the several contradictions that plagued his attempts to address this question. In his reading, provisions for citizenship based solely on domicile 'could result in a gigantic tragedy' for overseas Indians who were denied 'local' citizenship. And yet, others like B. N. Rau argued that the citizenship claims of Indians in South Africa rested on their domicile and therefore overseas Indians in other regions – those domiciled in Burma, for instance – could not seek to derive (Indian) citizenship on the exact opposite basis. According to Gundevia, the compromise enabling overseas Indians to register as citizens through diplomatic missions was achieved by the efforts of Nehru and Pandit Hriday Nath Kunzru, another politician deeply interested in the status of overseas Indians.[48] While one can quibble with Gundevia's version of his role in initiating the 'inconvenient correspondence' between Rau and Nehru that enabled this provision to be adopted in the Constitution, it is nevertheless clear that negotiating the citizenship status of overseas Indians was of considerable concern to Indian diplomacy and essential to the making of Indian citizenship.

---

[45] See B. R. Ambedkar, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches,* Vol 13 (New Delhi: Dr. Ambedkar Foundation, 2014), 808

[46] Speech in the Constituent Assembly, 12 August 1949, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (SWJN hereafter), Second Series, Vol 12 (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1991), 165

[47] Y. D. Gundevia, *Outside the Archives*, (Hyderabad: Sangam Books, 2012), Chapter 4, Kindle. Gundevia will be a familiar fixture in this thesis: we encounter him in chapter 5 too, managing the status of Indian immigrants as India's Deputy High Commissioner in the UK.

[48] Gundevia, *Outside the Archives*, Chapter 4.

Meanwhile, India's provisions of citizenship by birth were greeted with panic by a number of white Britons born in India who feared that this would make them Indian citizens at the cost of their British citizenship. The Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO) and the Indian High Commission in London received dozens of letters ranging from the anxious to the angry, with enquiries from these white Britons about their citizenship status or that of their children born in India. Often affirming that they were of 'pure British blood' untouched by their birth and/or stay in India, or describing their military service for Empire, these letter writers enquired about the procedures that would have to be followed to 'regain' British nationality.

One angry letter would note: 'I fought in the First World War. I gather in spite of this that I am now an enemy alien or something approaching it because I was born in India. I should like this blot on my escutcheon removed as soon as possible.'[49] There were also frequent enquiries as to the steps to be taken 'to ensure that for all purposes, especially in connection with passports, my wife and children would be treated as English and not as Hindus.'[50]

DECOLONIZATION AND CITIZENSHIP-MAKING

It is imperative to read Indian debates on citizenship within the wider crises of citizenship-making in Asia that marked decolonization. Scholars have only recently begun to highlight the ways in which constitution-making in Asia was significantly shaped by British constitutional legacies, creating what Kumarasingham calls 'Eastminsters': systems with 'clear institutional and political resemblances to Britain's system, but with cultural and constitutional deviations from Westminster.'[51] More importantly, the flurry of constitution-making across south and south east Asian countries often drew on the experiences of each other – to the extent that Indian legal experts were involved in the making of Burma and Malaya's constitutions. B. Malik, a former Chief Justice of the Allahabad High Court, had been part of the commission of Commonwealth legal experts involved in framing Malaya's constitution from 1956-57,

[49] Letter from W. H Marshall to the CRO, 29 Sep 1949, India Office Records (IOR hereafter): L/PJ/7/15042, 'Persons to whom Political Dept. Memo on registration as United Kingdom Citizens of persons born in India has been sent on enquiry', British Library (BL hereafter).
[50] Letter from L. V. Heathcote to the CRO, Jan 14, 1950, IOR: L/PJ/7/15042, BL.
[51] Harshan Kumarasingham, 'Eastminster – Decolonisation and State-Building in British Asia,' in *Constitution-Making in Asia: Decolonisation and State-Building in the Aftermath of the British Empire*, ed, Harshan Kumarasingham (New York: Routledge, 2016), 2.

while B. N. Rau had been a constitutional advisor to the Burmese government in 1947.[52]

While these perspectives placing Asian histories of constitution-making in conversation with one another are highly useful, they do not ask what this meant in terms of drafting parallel citizenship legislations in highly diverse societies with long, controversial histories of migration. Indeed, B. N. Rau's example typifies these intersections: at much the same time as he was involved in the making of the Indian constitution and articulating ideas of reciprocal citizenship, he was also advising the Burmese government regarding their constitution which included largely *jus sanguinis*-based citizenship provisions that were, he admitted, 'somewhat complicated' in the case of Indians settled in Burma.[53] Accusing Rau of legislating from the secure confines of his ivory tower, Gundevia argued that the clause for Indians to gain Burmese citizenship by registration if they had resided in Burma 'for a period of at least eight years in the ten years immediately preceding the commencement of the constitution' was gravely insufficient.[54] Indeed, the process of applying for citizenship under these provisions, armed with the 'right' paper trail as proof, was complicated: 'many Indian residents failed to realize the importance that pieces of paper would hold.'[55]

Burma's Union Citizenship Act and Land Nationalisation Act of 1948 – legislations directly aimed at Indians and delineating them as neither 'indigenous' nor a 'national minority' – were a long time coming, given the steady rise in anti-Indian sentiments and move towards legal 'Burmanisation' after separation from India in 1937.[56] This spurred significant waves of Indian exodus from Burma, also prompting reluctant initiatives by the Government of India towards repatriation.[57] 1948 also marked the year when a newly-independent Ceylon passed the Ceylon Citizenship Act no. 18 in great haste, even

---

[52] Joseph M. Fernando, 'Constitutionalism and the politics of constitution-making in Malaya, 1956-1957,' in *Constitution-Making in Asia : Decolonisation and State-Building in the Aftermath of the British Empire*, ed, Harshan Kumarasingham (New York: Routledge, 2016), 142-143

[53] Benegal Narsing Rau, *India's Constitution in the Making*, edited by B. Shiva Rao (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1960), 473-474

[54] Rau, *India's Constitution in the Making*, 474 and Gundevia, *Outside the Archives*, chap. 4. Also see Tinker, *Separate and Unequal*, 340-341.

[55] Sunil S. Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal*: *The Furies of Nature and the Fortunes of Migrants,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 228

[56] Renaud Egreteau, 'India's Vanishing "Burma Colonies". Repatriation, Urban Citizenship, and (De)Mobilization of Indian Returnees from Burma (Myanmar) since the 1960s,' *Moussons. Recherche en sciences humaines sur l'Asie du Sud-Est,* 22 (2013): 11-34.

[57] Renaud Egreteau, 'Burmese Indians in contemporary Burma: heritage, influence, and perceptions since 1988,' *Asian Ethnicity*, 12, no. 1, (2011), 40 and Myron Weiner, 'Rejected Peoples and Unwanted Migrants in South Asia,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28, no. 34 (1993): 1737-1746. For more on the crisis in Burma, see Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal*, 230, Varadarajan, *The Domestic Abroad*, 68-69 and Chatterji, 'From Imperial Subjects to National Citizens,' 190-191.

as negotiations with the Indian government regarding the status of Indians in Ceylon were ongoing.[58] This framework provided for citizenship only on the basis of descent: that is, on the condition that three generations of the paternal line had been Ceylonese. This stark rule was no doubt aimed at disqualifying most if not all Indian Tamils from citizenship.[59] Following several discussions with Nehru and other Indian officials, a new citizenship framework called the Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act was introduced in 1949, ostensibly to provide citizenship by registration for Indians.

This was nevertheless little better than the previous legislation: its incredibly strict provisions asking Indians to prove a 'minimum period of uninterrupted residence' (seven years for married persons and ten years for unmarried persons immediately prior to 1 January 1946), an 'assured income' and loyalty to Ceylon.[60] Nehru had contested many of the provisions of this legislation, writing to the Prime Minister of Ceylon D. S. Senanayake that the latter's view of Indian emigrants to Ceylon as a 'temporary' presence was 'contrary to the facts of history'. He reiterated that India had long allowed its nationals to emigrate only on the condition that 'an emigrant labourer should be given facilities to settle in the country to which he emigrates, on equal terms with members of the indigenous population.'[61] Even as Nehru appealed to Senanayake's 'sense of justice … and desire for friendship with India' to ask for an 'assurance that in future there will be no administrative or legislative discrimination against Indians who become citizens by registration', his protestations were not fruitful.[62]

These issues of statelessness, citizenship and repatriation of overseas Indians in Ceylon, Burma and beyond would continue to resonate in Indian diplomacy for decades. More immediately, they provided the overarching framework within which Indian citizenship was to be drafted. This was so even as much of the initial attention was focused on the mass movement of populations and geopolitical ramifications caused by Partition –

---

[58] Valli Kanapathipillai argues that this was against the 'expressed wishes of the Government of India', while Amita Shastri too reiterates that this was a 'unilateral' announcement of the citizenship legislation. See Valli Kanapathipillai, *Citizenship and Statelessness in Sri Lanka: The Case of the Tamil Estate Workers* (London: Anthem Press, 2009), 41 and Amita Shastri, 'Estate Tamils, the Ceylon citizenship act of 1948 and Sri Lankan politics,' *Contemporary South Asia,* 8, no. 1 (1999): 77.

[59] Kalyani Ramnath, 'Boats in a Storm: Law, Politics, and Jurisdiction in Postwar South Asia' (PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 2018). This legislation did not however deny citizenship to Ceylon Tamils.

[60] Ramnath, 'Boats in a Storm'.

[61] Nehru's letter to D. S. Senanayake, 17 July 1948, *SWJN,* Second Series, Vol 7 (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1988)

[62] Nehru's letter to D. S. Senanayake, 8 Sep 1948, *SWJN,* Second Series, Vol 7 (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1988)

indeed, Gundevia recalls his hesitation to bring up the subject of Indians in Burma given the impression that 'nobody in Delhi has time for … (this) … problem. You will not get them to talk about anything but Kashmir, Pakistan and the UN for a long time.'[63] This wasn't to be the case. Indeed, the year 1948 alone marked the framing of three nationality and citizenship laws that would have significant repercussions on overseas Indians: while Ceylon and Burma both legislated citizenship acts designed to exclude Indian communities, the 1948 BNA was perhaps the only legislation providing Indians with some semblance of an equal status by recognizing them as British subjects or Commonwealth citizens.[64] The making of Indian citizenship thus necessarily meant that Indian officials had to engage with these provisions of the BNA that impacted both overseas Indians and those domiciled in India. Indeed, the BNA would affect the case of Indians in Burma and Ceylon too, shaping their status as entangled citizens caught between various possibilities of citizenship while staring down the barrel of statelessness. The Ceylon citizenship act was also responding to the BNA by providing 'local citizenship' for its citizens who would thereby also be eligible for 'Commonwealth citizenship'. Indians who did not qualify for local citizenship would thus be rendered stateless if provisions were not made for their inclusion as Indian citizens or, as British officials feared, citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies. On the other hand, the citizenship status of Indians in Burma was further complicated by Burma's exit from the Commonwealth in 1947 – making these Indians 'foreigners' who were ineligible for Commonwealth citizenship status.[65] Thus, as we shall see, the making of Indian citizenship legislation *by default* meant negotiating the simultaneous unravelling and entanglement of identities and nationalities during decolonization.

DRAFTING THE 1955 INDIAN CITIZENSHIP ACT

While there is a significant literature on Indian citizenship frameworks, particularly in terms of the making of the Constitution after Partition, the 1955 Indian Citizenship Act itself is not the subject of much study. Indeed, while scholars have dealt with the provisions of the act, this is almost always in comparison to the later amendments made in the context of 'illegal immigrants' in the 1980s.[66] This literature sees the amendments

[63] Gundevia, *Outside the Archives*, Chapter 4.

[64] See Varadarajan, *The Domestic Abroad*, 67-69. While Varadarajan discusses the legislations of Ceylon and Burma, she does not mention the BNA.

[65] See Tinker, *Separate and Unequal*, 344.

[66] See Jayal, *Citizenship and its Discontents,* 63 and Jayal, 'Citizenship,' 163-168. Also see Anupama Roy, *Mapping Citizenship in India*, Chapter 1, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010) accessed via Oxford Scholarship Online, Kamal Sadiq, *Paper Citizens: How Illegal Immigrants Acquire Citizenship in Developing*

to the 1955 act as indicative of the transition from *jus solis* to *jus sanguinis* in India's citizenship regime, although as Jayal has argued, 'the tension between these two conceptions was present from the founding moment of the republic.'[67] While Anupama Roy recognizes the period between 1950, when the constitutional provisions regarding citizenship came into effect, and 1955, when the citizenship act was adopted, as a 'liminal space' creating 'awkward', 'transitional' and 'aspiring' citizens, she views this solely from the lens of Partition and movement across the India-Pakistan borders.[68] Moreover, she does not ask *why* it was that such a liminal space was created – why did the Indian Citizenship Act (ICA) take so long to come into effect? As I will show, this delay was very much due to the struggle to reconcile the ICA with the provisions of the BNA.

On 18 August 1949, K. V. K. Sundaram, Secretary of the Ministry of Law, circulated a draft Indian citizenship bill to the Ministries of External Affairs, Home, and Law, urging that 'no time should be lost in finalizing' such an important piece of legislation.[69] Sundaram's draft was faithful in its reiteration of 'reciprocity of citizenship' that underpinned India's membership of the Commonwealth. Closely following the 'important provisions of the British Nationality Act 1948', his draft declared that every person who 'under this act is a citizen of India or who under the citizenship law in force in any Commonwealth country is a citizen of that country' would be recognised in India as having the status of a Commonwealth citizen. Provision was also made for the Government of India to recognize the citizenship law of any Commonwealth country, through a declaration in the Gazette of India, as suitable for terms of 'reciprocity' – a clause mainly aimed at South Africa and Pakistan.[70]

These provisions of the draft bill received a guarded response from the Ministries of External Affairs and Home Affairs who were sceptical about the extent to which ideas of Commonwealth citizenship could be accommodated in Indian citizenship legislation. Indeed while P. N. Haksar of the MEA pointed out that there was 'no formal bond binding us' nor was there a 'statute defining Commonwealth citizenship'[71], Sir G. S. Bajpai, Secretary General of the MEA who had travelled with Nehru to the 1949

Countries (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) and Roy, 'Between Encompassment and Closure,' 226-230.

[67] Jayal, *Citizenship and its Discontents*, 52.

[68] Anupama Roy, *Mapping Citizenship in India*, chap.1.

[69] Letter from K. V. K. Sundaram to S. Dutt, 18.8.49, File 45-1/49-UK, NAI.

[70] Further discussions also paved way for Ireland to be treated as a Commonwealth country on terms of reciprocity. File 45-1/49-UK, NAI.

[71] Handwritten note by P. N. Haksar in file, 19.1.51, File 45-1/49-UK, NAI.

Commonwealth Prime Ministers conference, argued somewhat incredibly that the subject of Commonwealth citizenship had never been discussed in any of the meetings.[72] The flurry of notes, memos and letters in the file on Indian citizenship were all united in their confusion about what exactly the conveniently hazy term 'Commonwealth citizenship' meant and what, if anything, it might have to do with 'reciprocity'. Was Commonwealth citizenship nothing more than a synonym for the common British subject status shared by countries of the Commonwealth, as per the BNA? Or could it be a means through which each Commonwealth nation offered the other citizenship through terms of reciprocity? As we will see**,** Indian officials defined the terms of Commonwealth citizenship in various ways: placing citizens of Commonwealth countries on par with 'nationals', granting them Indian citizenship itself, or, at the very least, not regarding them as foreigners. While Sundaram's draft was more on the lines of the first option, further deliberations with MEA and MHA officials led to a rather different conception.

These officials railed against the hollow promises of 'reciprocity' within the Commonwealth, arguing that 'excepting in the UK, in no other dominion or colony of the Commonwealth are Indians treated with complete equality or treated on par with nationals.'[73] As Bajpai argued, this had not only created public 'resentment in India against the concept of a Commonwealth citizenship ... such citizenship would, to Indian citizens, be of no value.'[74] By 1951, the draft citizenship bill was more thorough in defining 'Commonwealth citizens' as neither aliens nor on par with Indian citizens: indeed as an internal note pointed out, India could 'hardly be expected to accord national treatment in respect of entry into this country to persons belonging to territories from which Indians have been excluded in view of migration regulations.'[75] Most importantly, in contrast to Sundaram's draft, the new version did not recognize the status of Indians themselves as 'Commonwealth citizens', arguing that 'even the nominal recognition' of Indians as possessing a 'common' British subject or Commonwealth citizen status might 'make it difficult for Government to restrict the entry of British business … without raising a cry of unfair discrimination.'[76]

Even as Indian bureaucrats prevaricated over these provisions of Commonwealth

[72] G. S. Bajpai's reply to revised citizenship draft, 3.3.51, File 45-1/49-UK, NAI.
[73] P. N. Haksar's reply to S. Dutt, 29.5.51, File 45-1/49-UK, NAI. As we shall see, the notable exception of the UK would have longstanding consequences for the status of overseas Indians.
[74] G. S. Bajpai's reply to revised citizenship draft. 3.3.51, File 45-1/49-UK, NAI
[75] Internal note for Cabinet', 24.2.51, File 45-1/49-UK, NAI
[76] Ministry of Home Affairs, Note for Cabinet, (undated), File 45-1/49-UK, NAI

citizenship, the delay in passing legislation – further compounded by the fact that Parliament was not in session – had a tremendous impact on the status of Indians across the world.[77] Thus Nehru pondered over ways to address the numerous citizenship applications received, in the absence of a citizenship law.[78] For his part, Commonwealth Secretary Subimal Dutt also wondered if some interim provision could be made to enable the few Indians registered as Ceylon citizens under the new Indian and Pakistani Residents Act to renounce their Indian citizenship and thereby avoid the accusation of dual nationality, prohibited in Ceylon's law.[79] Arguing that this was in essence 'the impinging of Indian citizenship law on Indians abroad', one official called for the draft bill to be circulated for comments from diplomatic representatives in countries with large Indian populations.[80] The draft bill was therefore circulated to the Indian missions in British colonies and Dominions, notably East Africa, Malaya, Fiji, Ceylon, South Africa, Burma, West Indies, and Mauritius.

The representative in South Africa noted that they had 'discouraged' Indians from registering as Indian citizens, given that there was no time limit to register as Indian citizens and it would be to their advantage to do so later on when they settled in India or gave up domicile in South Africa.[81] R. T. Chari, the High Commissioner in Ceylon noted his concern that if Indians in Ceylon registered for Indian citizenship, this might result in the host country denying its citizenship to them, leading to 'a large number of them seeking registration as Indian citizens for the sole object of obtaining passport facilities and without any intention of reverting to Indian domicile.'[82] There was also some concern expressed by Apa Pant, the High Commissioner in East Africa, that those Indians 'disloyal to India' might register themselves as citizens of the UKC by claiming to be stateless. [83]

By 1951, a draft incorporating some of these insights was circulated to British officials who had long been enquiring about the status of the Indian Citizenship Act. The Commonwealth Relations Office's response was on expected lines: writing to Menon, the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations Patrick Gordon-Walker noted that

[77] As R. K. Nehru wrote to the Prime Minister, the prevarication over Commonwealth citizenship was 'the only thing which is holding up legislation'. R. K. Nehru's letter to J. Nehru, 2.7.52, File 45-1/49-UK, NAI
[78] J. Nehru to Secretary (CR), 20.9.51, File 45-1/49-UK, NAI
[79] S. Dutt, 16.1.51, , File 45-1/49-UK, NAI
[80] Note by R. T. Chari, 14.4.52, File 45-1/49-UK, NAI
[81] Letter from Indian High Commission in South Africa, 2.7.52, File 45-1/49-UK, NAI
[82] Minute by R. T. Chari, 19.7.1952, 'A Minute on the Indian Citizenship Bill, File 45-1/49-UK, NAI
[83] Letter from Apa Pant, Indian HC in East Africa, 4.9.52, File 45-1/49-UK, NAI.

India's bill neither recognized Indians as Commonwealth citizens nor recognized citizens of Commonwealth countries as Commonwealth citizens for 'all purposes in Indian law'.[84] Gordon-Walker argued that it was due to India's suggestion that the term 'Commonwealth citizen' had been adopted in the BNA and it was therefore curious that India had not recognized her own citizens as such. A chastened Menon wrote to Nehru in agreement – there was 'nothing to object' to in Gordon-Walker's note, he argued, calling on Nehru to 'agree to the arrangement which does not give the impression that we are running away.'[85] Chiding his bureaucrats rather belatedly for claiming that there had been no dialogue regarding Commonwealth citizenship, Nehru pointed out that this had indeed been discussed in the Commonwealth meetings of 1948 and 1949:

> I am concerned … because of certain *rather vague* understandings arrived at between me and the UK govt. They were not binding in any way but they cannot be brushed aside. The understanding was that there should be some kind of Commonwealth citizenship (to which India should be a party) … that this should be on a reciprocal basis with each Commonwealth country. Thus South Africa would get no privileges in India and Commonwealth countries could only get the privileges which they give to Indians. Commonwealth citizenship (sic) to be something between nationality and the status of an alien.[86]

This intervention led to a revised draft with a clause providing that the 'Central Government may, by order notified in the Official Gazette, make provisions *on basis of reciprocity for the conferment of all or any of the rights of a citizen of India* on the citizens of a Commonwealth country'– a clause modeled after the BNA and moving somewhat closer to Sundaram's initial draft.[87] Indian citizens were however still not recognized as Commonwealth citizens: Subimal Dutt argued that in suggesting the change from 'British subject' to 'Commonwealth citizen', India had merely called for a change in terminology more suited to a postcolonial context, rather than make a 'permanent commitment' for formal Commonwealth citizenship status.[88] The dissonance between the bureaucratic apparatus in Delhi and the Indian High Commission in London was palpable in Menon's consistent arguments for broadening the scope of Commonwealth citizenship, 'not merely to confer any or all the rights of a citizen of India but also (Indian) citizenship

[84] Letter from Patrick Gordon-Walker to V.K Krishna Menon, 9.5.51, File 45-1/49-UK, NAI
[85] Krishna Menon to Nehru, 11.5.51, File 45-1/49-UK, NAI
[86] Handwritten minute by Nehru in file, 29.5.51, File 45-1/49-UK, NAI. Italics added.
[87] Telegram from Nehru to Menon, 19.8.51, File 45-1/49-UK, NAI. Italics added.
[88] S. Dutt, 2.6.1951, 'MEA Summary', File 45-1/49-UK, NAI

itself.'[89] This was unacceptable back in Delhi, with officials asserting that the revised draft would nevertheless 'enable a Commonwealth citizen without being a "citizen of India" to enjoy all or any of the rights of a citizen of India on a reciprocal basis.'[90] The Indian citizenship act thus reiterated the status of the Commonwealth citizen as an intermediate category: neither foreign nor Indian, although they could on a reciprocal basis obtain the rights of a citizen of India. Unlike Pakistan, India would not acknowledge its citizens as 'Commonwealth citizens' in its citizenship act, even though other countries recognized them as such. Indeed, 'implicit' recognition of this condition was regarded as sufficient; after all, 'for us, Indian citizenship is the highest imaginable status'.[91]

BRITAIN, INDIA AND THE HAZE OF ENTANGLEMENT

In June 1954, S. N. Chaudhuri was traveling back to India on the S.S United States: as the ship neared Southampton, the port of disembarkation, passengers on board were asked to line up in two queues. Seeing that the queues were for 'British subjects' and 'other nationalities', Chaudhuri dutifully joined the latter. When asked by an officer of the ship to move to the queue for British subjects, he refused, noting that he was an Indian citizen. In the altercation that followed, the officer too stood his ground, asserting that Chaudhuri was indeed a British subject and would be better off doing as he was told.[92] This minor incident was nonetheless the subject of diplomatic correspondence between Indian, British and American officials: a testament to both the pervasive haze over Chaudhuri's entangled legal status and the difficulties of negotiating changing terminologies of citizenship and subject status within the Commonwealth. Even as CRO officials noted that the officer was only trying to help Chaudhuri avail himself of the advantages of a British subject, entitling him, 'to land without visas or other restrictive documents', to stay as long as he wished, and to take up employment without restrictions', they conceded that the term 'Commonwealth citizen' should be used widely in order to avoid such misunderstandings. [93]

This was not the first time that there had been protests about the continual usage of the term 'British subject' at immigration ports in particular. Nor were Indians the only ones bringing up such cases: officials recounted many an instance of such issues raised by

[89] Telegram from Menon to Nehru, 26.8.51, File 45-1/49-UK, NAI
[90] S. Dutt, Express letter to Menon, 23.9.51, File 45-1/49-UK, NAI
[91] K. N. Katju's reply to HM (Home), 16.5.52 File 45-1/49-UK, NAI
[92] Letter from Apa Pant to Sheldon Mills, US embassy, New Delhi, 10.6.54, DO 35/10303, '"British Subject" – Objections by Citizens Commonwealth Countries', TNA
[93] Letter from Jean K Walker, 22.6.54, DO 35/10303, TNA

citizens of Ceylon, Ireland and South Africa. Yet CRO officials seeking to popularize the term 'Commonwealth citizens' were waging a losing battle. When the issue of replacing the term 'British subject' in notices displayed at ports was taken to Southampton, the same port where Chaudhury had protested, 'the reactions of the official were so explosive (his actual remarks are unmentionable) that the matter was dropped.'[94] More mentionably, Home Office officials nevertheless refused to change the notices at immigration points, stating that there was 'no reason why an Indian citizen, if he insists, should not join the 'non-British' queue and assert his independence at the cost of being delayed'.[95] Given the extent to which 'our own house is so patently not in order', Harold Davies of the CRO pointed out that they could hardly ask Indian officials to 'change some of their immigration procedures (where) travellers are classified into only two categories as "Indians" and "foreigners".'[96]

The unease that came with abandoning old imperial standards no doubt manifested itself in an increasing reluctance to adopt often confusing new terminologies: as E. L. Sykes of the British High Commission in Delhi signed off in a letter about Chaudhuri's case: 'how much simpler life must have been when the "British Empire" constituted of Colonies whose occupants were 'British subjects!'[97] Sykes also complained that the 'powers that be' in Britain seemed befuddled by the new terms pertaining to citizenship, suggesting that making the term 'Commonwealth citizen' more widespread might 'make their pronouncements more accurate and easy to understand'.[98] British officials were however not the only ones caught in this haze of complex new citizenship frameworks. Indeed, the Indian diplomat Apa Pant's response to Chaudhuri's case is telling: when British and American officials assured him that Indians would henceforth be called 'Commonwealth citizens', Pant retorted somewhat incredibly that this terminology was not correct either – 'the appropriate term that should be used in such cases is "Nationals of Commonwealth countries."'[99] For Indian officials seeking to disentangle identities shaped by Empire, confusion over the terminologies and legal status of Indians, even the very question of defining an 'Indian', and the 'vague' nature of the Commonwealth relationship, was all-pervasive. This uncertainty was reflected in the various, often-contradictory statements regarding India's relationship with its overseas community and

[94] D. W. H. Wickson to D. M. R. Skinner, 7.11.56, DO 35/10303, TNA
[95] E. N. Kent to Wickson, 7.2.55, DO 35/10303, TNA
[96] H. E. Davies to F. A. K. Harrison, 23.4.55, DO 35/10303, TNA
[97] E. L. Sykes to T. Eliot Weil, US embassy, 5.7.54, DO 35/10303, TNA
[98] E. L. Sykes to F. A. K. Harrison, 6.7.54, DO 35/10303, TNA
[99] Letter from Apa Pant to Eliot Weil, US embassy, New Delhi, 24.6.54, DO 35/10303, TNA. Pant had recently returned to Delhi after a controversial stint as India's Commissioner in East Africa.

would also be especially evident in diplomatic negotiations with Britain to declare and reciprocally 'recognize' each other's citizenship legislations. This was essential to delineate the responsibility of Britain and India over 'Indians' who could be Indian citizens or Citizens of the UKC.

Even the most vociferous critics of the discrimination encountered by Indians across British colonies and Dominions were in agreement that the situation in Britain itself was entirely different. As Sir G. S. Bajpai noted, there was 'complete equality' in the legal status and treatment of Indians in Britain, on par with citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies as per the BNA.[100] Indeed in November 1949, the British government had passed the India Consequential Provision Act, a law popularly termed the 'holding act' since it ensured the continuation of all laws in force vis-à-vis India until the Indian government enacted new legislation to replace them. As the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, Philip Noel-Baker pointed out in Parliament, this also meant that Indians in Britain would 'continue to have in this country the same rights and privileges as they have today.'[101] Yet, terms of reciprocity with Britain were very much a double-edged sword: while Indian officials worried that reciprocity would open the floodgates for British capital into India,[102] they were nonetheless also concerned that refusing reciprocal treatment may adversely affect the status of Indians in the UK.[103] Moreover, how could there be 'reciprocity of citizenship' when there was no 'British citizenship' as such but a more cumbersome 'Citizenship of the United Kingdom and Colonies', conjoining the metropole and the colonies (where Indians were often discriminated against)?[104] Most importantly however, the BNA – in combination with the holding act – provided the overarching framework within which the identity of Indians was being negotiated: both in the case of overseas Indians settled in colonial territories who were temporary 'British subjects without citizenship' and domiciled Indians who had the free right of entry and equal status in Britain as British subjects.

Reconciling the citizenship frameworks of the BNA and ICA was thus essential to delineating the status of Indians, especially those in British colonial territories, and the

[100] G. S. Bajpai's reply to revised citizenship draft. 3.3.51, File 45-1/49-UK, NAI

[101] Remarks of Philip Noel-Baker. 'Orders of the Day: India (Consequential Provision) Bill', Hansard, 05 December 1949 vol 470 cc 1541-70.
https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1949/dec/05/india-consequential-provision-bill

[102] Memo by M. A. Husain, 29.5.50, File 45-1/49-UK, NAI

[103] Subimal Dutt, 2.3.51, File 45-1/49-UK, NAI

[104] Indian diplomats frequently use the term 'British citizenship' in place of CUKC, even though they were also clearly aware that no such status existed.

'moral responsibility' of India or Britain over them. This was not going to be an easy process, given that British officials were still providing passports and other consular facilities for Indians in regions where India did not as yet have diplomatic representation. Indeed, as one internal British memo caustically noted, this was an extraordinary circumstance where Indian officials themselves reiterated the status of Indians as 'British subjects' in UK law, asking them to 'ensure that British consular officers protect them as such.'[105] British officials were, however, increasingly reluctant to perform such work, given the delay in finalizing Indian citizenship legislation that would demarcate their responsibility over these functions. Indian diplomats interpreted this as 'their indirect pressure on us to pass our law… (otherwise)… the Indian community in British colonies will be put to considerable inconvenience.'[106]

Such pressure was not so much due to India's limited provision for Commonwealth citizenship as it was a result of what the British regarded as the inadequacy of the draft citizenship legislation in accounting for overseas Indians.[107] British concerns stemmed from the fact that the draft legislation did not permit the automatic acquisition of Indian citizenship by 'persons of Indian origin or birth resident outside India', and asked instead that overseas Indians register for citizenship at Indian consulates and diplomatic missions in their countries of residence. Moreover, the draft did not confer citizenship on those born *before* 26 Jan 1950, leaving these persons under the purview of existing provisions for citizenship in the Indian constitution – provisions that British officials had long regarded as insufficient for the purposes of 'declaring' the Indian legislation under the BNA.[108] That is, officials feared that 'declaring' or recognizing the Indian act 'to be an enactment making provision for citizenship' by order of the Secretary of State under Article 32(8) of the BNA, would mean that all 'potential Indians' resident in British colonial territories and Commonwealth regions who were not included in India's citizenship legislation, would automatically have to be 'mopped up' as UKC citizens.[109] A similar clause had been included in India's draft citizenship law in order to provide 'reciprocal' recognition of citizenship frameworks.

---

[105] Undated note marked T. D. O'L, DO 35/10303, TNA

[106] Note by B. N. Nanda, 1.8.52, File 45-1/49-UK, NAI

[107] E. J. Emery, an official at the UK High Commission in New Delhi, made this clear in his correspondence to A. F. Morley of the CRO, 9.12.53, DO35/6386, 'Indian citizenship legislation', TNA

[108] H. E. Davies to F. A. K. Harrison, 6.5.55, DO35/6386, TNA

[109] Telegram from CRO to UK High Commissioners in India and Pakistan, 6.8.55 DO35/6386, TNA. Also see the full text of article 32(8) of the BNA here http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1948/56/pdfs/ukpga_19480056_en.pdf

British officials viewed the Indian legislation's provision of citizenship by registration as a calculated move through which Indian officials could only choose those 'regarded as likely to make good citizens', and to 'take those people they want and reject those they don't.'[110] Yet, this provision of registration served other important purposes for overseas Indians too: as H. E. Davies presciently noted, this was also 'intended to warn the Ceylon government that there would not be an automatic incorporation of masses of overseas Indians as citizens of India.'[111] This was therefore a careful clause drafted at a time when repatriation had been increasingly propagated by governments in Burma, Ceylon, Malaya and South Africa as a means of permanently excluding long-resident Indian populations.[112] Thus while it is indeed the case that the clause of registration allowed Indian officials to carefully discriminate in choosing the 'right kind' of Indian citizen – ensuring that the individual showed no sign of pro-Pakistan sentiment was crucial, for instance – this was only one aspect of the state's nuanced engagement with overseas Indians.[113] Urging these Indians to take up the citizenship of the countries of residence if available to them, Indian officials nevertheless assured them that doing so would not harm their right to acquire Indian citizenship in the future, if they so desired.[114] In fact, worried officials at the MEA issued circulars to Indian missions in Commonwealth countries and British colonial territories asking them to stop preparing registers of those that had registered as Indian citizens. As Dutt pointed out,

> It is appreciated that ordinarily it would be an advantage to have a full register of Indian citizens in each country abroad so that the Indian representative would know which persons would be entitled to his protection. It has, however, been presented ... that in some of the territories the act of registration as an Indian citizen by a person of Indian origin might be taken by the authorities of the country where he is resident as an indication by such person of not having identified himself completely with the life of that country.[115]

---

[110] Jean Walker to D. W. H. Wickson, 25 Oct 1954, DO35/6387, 'Indian citizenship legislation', TNA

[111] Note by H. E. Davies, 12 May 1955, DO35/6386, TNA

[112] Vineet Thakur refers to South Africa's increasing preference for repatriation of Indians. Vineet Thakur, 'An Asian Drama: The Asian Relations Conference, 1947,' *International History Review,* (2018) DOI: 10.1080/07075332.2018.1434809

[113] Letter from S. Dutt to all heads and missions of Indian representatives abroad, 21.6.60, 'The Citizenship Rules, 1956', NAI

[114] Letter from A. K. Ray, Undersecretary of MEA to Priti Singh, 1.8.59, 'The Citizenship Rules, 1956', NAI.

[115] Letter from S. Dutt to all heads and missions of Indian representatives abroad, 21.6.60, 'The Citizenship Rules, 1956', NAI

Concerned that this would be taken as a sign of the unfaithfulness of the Indian community as a whole and invite reprisals, Dutt also warned against issuing any public notifications regarding the registration of Indian citizens. The Indian state's relationship with its overseas communities thus involved walking a very fine line and taking even seemingly contradictory positions. Indeed, this was evident in India's response to the Malayan government over its decision to 'banish' certain 'undesirable Indians'. Claiming that these persons were not Indian citizens, the Indian government refused to acknowledge their alleged right to 'return' to India. And yet, as Jean Walker, a British High Commission official in New Delhi noted angrily, 'While refusing to acknowledge these 'banishees' as Indian citizens, the Indian authorities are nevertheless demanding certain things – transfer to more suitable gaols – on their behalf!'[116] Walker reiterated that this was fairly typical of the Indian government's engagement with overseas Indians: 'this … serves as an example of the trouble we and the authorities in any colony where there is a large number of Indians, have when it comes to attempting to determine Indian citizenship.'[117] Such seemingly paradoxical actions can be better explained if we view the Indian state's actions as attempts to ensure that *Indians across the world had citizenship rights*. The goal was not necessarily to grant them *Indian* citizenship – although that option could be available in the future, at least on paper, if they were denied citizenship elsewhere. The Indian state's frequent exhortations calling on overseas Indians to identify with their countries of residence must therefore be understood in this context, in a scenario deeply impacted by the crises of citizenship and statelessness encountered by Indians who were often forcibly repatriated from countries such as Ceylon, Malaya, Burma etc where they had long resided. Indeed, as Nehru haltingly phrased it in 1953:

> We are concerned with the fate of hundreds and thousands of these people who, though no longer citizens and nationals of India, were in the past connected with India, about whom we have various agreements and assurances and the like, and therefore we have a certain responsibility with regard to them, although they are not our nationals.[118]

The question of India's and Britain's responsibility over Indian communities in British colonial territories and the Commonwealth was the subject of considerable discussion between British and Indian officials deliberating over the Indian citizenship legislation. In

[116] Jean Walker to D. W. H. Wickson, 25.10.54, DO35/6387, TNA
[117] Jean Walker to D. W. H. Wickson, 25.10.54, DO35/6387, TNA
[118] See Appendix 1, MEA annual report for the year 1953-54 https://mealib.nic.in/?pdf2480

a meeting with Davies in August 1955, Fateh Singh of the MHA admitted that while there were many who might be left without citizenship by the Constitution, the 'Indian government's policy was to enable as many as possible of those who were India's responsibility to be registered.'[119] In Singh's view, those excluded from Indian citizenship for a variety of reasons would nevertheless have the option of being eligible for UKC and other citizenships. Of the three main categories of overseas Indians without citizenship – those living in British colonies, those living in foreign countries, and those living in Commonwealth countries such as Pakistan, South Africa and Ceylon – Singh argued that the first category was 'obviously' the responsibility of the British. Davies concurred, even as he was somewhat more sceptical of Singh's suggestion that while most overseas Indians living in foreign countries would register as Indian citizens, Britain 'ought not to mind accepting the few who are left over.'[120]

Yet it was the prospect of becoming responsible for those in the third category that most worried the British. The stark position of Indians in Commonwealth countries like Ceylon was becoming illustrative of British fears that they might be considered responsible for the 'left over' Indians not covered by the citizenship provisions of India. This was especially so since the British had somewhat inexplicably declared the 1948 Ceylon Citizenship Act as a citizenship law for the purposes of the BNA – in contrast to their grave reluctance regarding declaring both India's and Pakistan's legislations.[121] Despite the 1954 Nehru-Kotelawala pact's attempt to reduce the magnitude of this situation, there were nearly 975,000 persons deemed 'stateless' by India and viewed as 'Indian citizens' by Ceylon by the time all these citizenship applications had been processed in 1962.[122]

This was so even as India sought to provide some options for those not included in Ceylon's citizenship framework to register as Indian citizens, while still resisting compulsory repatriation[123] British officials watched this situation warily, worrying that as British subjects without citizenship, these 'stateless' persons might qualify to become

[119] H. E. Davies' report of his meeting with Fateh Singh, 20.8.55, DO35/6386, TNA.
[120] H. E. Davies' report of his meeting with Fateh Singh, 20.8.55, DO35/6386, TNA.
[121] British officials argued that this was probably due to the fact that the Ceylon act was in place before the BNA came into effect, although they did acknowledge that if the Indians brought this up, they did not have much reason to argue that the Indian act could not be declared. Ceylon had also not declared its citizens to be Commonwealth citizens. See DO35/6386, TNA.
[122] See Urmila Phadnis, 'The Indo-Ceylon Pact and the "Stateless" Indians in Ceylon,' *Asian Survey,* 7, no. 4 (1967): 226-236
[123] Kanapathipillai, *Citizenship and Statelessness in Sri Lanka,* 75

UKC citizens if the Indian act was declared.[124] Even as they resisted declaring the Indian act due to these concerns, British officials nevertheless reiterated that this should not impact India's recognition of the BNA for the purposes of reciprocity. That is, while India would have to declare the BNA in order to provide for equal rights to UKC citizens, Indian citizens in Britain – owing to their status as British subjects under the BNA – would receive equal rights regardless of the Indian act being declared as a citizenship legislation for the purposes of the BNA. As D. W. H. Wickson of the CRO angrily noted, Singh did not seem to realize that 'registration (as Indian citizens) does not appeal to many persons of Indian race for whom India should morally be responsible.' Wickson anticipated this to be a great problem for British officials:

> … in the majority of cases Indians in foreign countries seem to prefer to remain British subjects without citizenship (and hold a UK passport) rather than register as Indian citizens. There will certainly be more than a few left over … The glib suggestion that we should mop up all the Indians who fail to acquire Indian citizenship as a quid pro quo for Indian declaration of the British Nationality Act, is staggering.[125]

The Indian citizenship act and relevant citizenship provisions in the Constitution therefore faced much the same fate as Pakistan's citizenship legislation – British officials fearing responsibility for 'left over' citizens did not move to declare these citizenship acts.[126] This of course meant that India would not recognize the BNA and refused reciprocity for UKC citizens, arguing additionally that while Indians did not face discrimination within the UK itself, they faced considerable inequities in British colonial territories.[127]Indeed, as F. A. K. Harrison acknowledged in an internal memo, 'This would appear to be a weakness in our case for claiming that full reciprocity already exists.'[128]

Britain and India's decision to not declare each other's citizenship law had several consequences, especially for Indians who had acquired UKC citizenship and later also wanted to register for Indian citizenship. Such a possibility for dual nationality would

---

[124] Note by A. F. P. Morley, 21.1.56, DO35/6386, TNA.

[125] Note by D. W. H. Wickson, 26.8.1955, TNA: DO35/6386

[126] See Ansari for more detail on the 'inadequacies' of the Pakistani act and its impact on 'potential Pakistanis'. Ansari, 'Subjects or Citizens?,' 299-312.

[127] H. E. Davies' report of his meeting with Fateh Singh, 20.8.55, DO35/6386, TNA.

[128] H. E. Davies' report of his meeting with Fateh Singh, 20.8.55, DO35/6386, TNA.

have existed if the Indian act had been recognised by Britain. In one instance in 1959, A. K. Ray of the MEA regretfully informed Mr Pritam Singh, and Mr and Mrs Menon – Indian-origin UKC citizens who had applied for Indian citizenship – that they could not be treated differently from other non-Indian UKC citizens who were not allowed to register as Indian citizens, since the Indian act was not yet recognized under British law. Instead, Ray reiterated that Indians with access to citizenship in their countries of residence ought to identify themselves with these countries. He also argued that any preferential treatment shown by India vis-à-vis registering Indian-origin UKC citizens would lead Commonwealth countries to 'doubt our sincerity and misunderstand our motives.'[129] There was a lot more at stake, as he pointed out:

> ... if persons of Indian origin were allowed to change their citizenship as and when they chose even after taking up the citizenship of the commonwealth country where they are resident it might create the impression that persons of Indian origin who take up the citizenship of other commonwealth countries merely do so for their own interest and are not genuine about identifying themselves with that country. Such an impression would ultimately be detrimental to their own interests. [130]

Reassuring Singh and the Menons that as UKC citizens they would nevertheless not face any hardships if they decided to settle down in India, he offered the hope that they could reapply once the Indian act was recognized by the British government. This was, of course, not meant to be. With the Indian Citizenship Act coming into effect in December 1955, a flurry of applications and requests made their way to British and Indian officials. Bureaucrats had to interpret these cases not just in the context of the new legislation, but in terms of the makeshift arrangements that had defined the entangled status of many Indians across the world until then. This was exemplified in the case of British subject passports that had been issued to many Indians by British officials during this interim period. Some Indian officials interpreted the possession of these passports as voluntary acquisition of UKC citizenship, thereby making the person concerned ineligible for Indian citizenship. Alarmed officials in the UK High Commission in Delhi rushed to assert that the granting of a British subject passport had been a temporary measure that had no significance in terms of citizenship in British law.

[129] A. K. Ray to Prithi Singh, 1.8.59, 'The Citizenship Rules, 1956', NAI
[130] A. K. Ray to Prithi Singh, 1.8.59, 'The Citizenship Rules, 1956', NAI.

Arguing that these individuals had always been regarded as 'potential citizens of India', E. G. Norris of the UKHC wrote to Fateh Singh that the only purpose of the passport had been to enable their travel and mobility at a time when they had 'been unable to establish their citizenship status but have had clear rights to be regarded as British subjects'.[131]

After conferring with bureaucrats from the External Affairs and Law ministries, Singh reassured British officials that the possession of a British subject passport – obtained in the interim period until Indian citizenship legislation was passed – did not count as 'voluntarily' acquiring a foreign citizenship and therefore would not disqualify these persons from Indian citizenship. There was however considerable debate between Indian officials about continuing this practice of Indians obtaining British subject passports. Home Ministry officials argued that this practice should be discouraged if these Indians wanted to register for Indian citizenship and pointed out, rather tellingly, that 'there was a good deal of feeling in Parliament when the Citizenship bill was under discussion that we in India should not do anything to give an impression to Indians or potential Indians abroad that they are still British subjects, whatever the position in British law.'[132] They instead recommended that India set up more consulates and missions to provide for Indian passports – a suggestion that MEA officials were quick to shoot down, given financial considerations. In contrast, they reiterated that overseas Indians had long relied on travel documents issued by British officials and there were considerable benefits in letting this practice continue. Indeed, as they noted, 'while we have no objection to the officials of our missions personally and orally advising actual and potential Indian citizens about the provisions of the citizenship act, it would be most untactful for them to do so in writing.'[133]

This secrecy is very much in line with the earlier instance of Indian missions being cautioned against creating registers of Indian citizens; that is, even as Indian officials provided citizenship provisions for overseas Indians, they were wary that this would be viewed by the host country as a sign of disloyalty and lead to discrimination. Law Ministry officials meanwhile put forth a more radical interpretation: they argued not just that British subject passport-holders were eligible for Indian citizenship, but that 'even the acquisition of UKC citizenship by persons of Indian origin would not be a bar to

[131] Letter from E. G. Norris to Fateh Singh, 24 May 1957, File no 20/98/57- IC, 'Indian Citizenship – Question of Issue of British Subject passports to persons who are potential Indian and potential British citizens – reference from the UK High Commission', NAI

[132] Note by Fateh Singh, 2.6.57, File 20/98/57- IC, NAI

[133] Note by N. V. Agate, Undersecretary (Cons), MEA, 14.6.57, File 20/98/57- IC, NAI

their acquisition of Indian citizenship by registration … our citizenship act recognizes dual nationality to that extent.'[134]

These varying interpretations of Indian citizenship law would be put to the test in the case of determining the status of overseas Indians, whose incredible entangled personal lives and histories were mapped on to their applications. The case of Mr Kathilal Sankaran Krishnan, an Indian-origin UKC citizen resident in Singapore, is instructive in this regard.[135] Approaching officials of the UK High Commission in Colombo during a visit to Ceylon, Krishnan sought their help in enabling his two sons – who had lived in Ceylon for some years – to join him in Singapore. The sons were born in British India in 1945 and 1947 and were regarded by Indian officials in Colombo as having lost their claim to Indian citizenship when their father opted to register as a UKC citizen in Singapore in 1954. A. N. G. Bone, a sympathetic official in the High Commission in Colombo wrote to his counterpart in Singapore worrying that 'it can be argued that by conferring UK citizenship on the father without warning him of the consequences, we have some responsibility for his minor children having become stateless.'[136] Bone was well aware of the complexities of getting travel documents for the sons, given the concurrence required from officials in Singapore and London, as well as the near certainty that Ceylon officials would not provide such documents for boys of Indian origin. Krishnan had gone so far as to tell Bone that he would make his own arrangements to get the boys into Singapore – 'I suspect via Malaya by a somewhat devious route or dubious practice', Bone noted – as long as High Commission officials agreed to provide travel documents. Bone reluctantly suggested that the 'possible cutting of the Gordian's knot would perhaps be achieved by the registration of these boys as UKCs under 7(1).'[137] This was however unacceptable for CRO officials who contested the Indian claim that these boys were ineligible for Indian citizenship. Officials in London argued that while Krishnan had indeed lost his Indian citizenship by registering as a citizen of the UKC, as per the 1955 Indian Citizenship Act, this loss of citizenship did not extend to his minor children born in India.[138]

The archival paper trail on the Krishnans does not extend beyond this, although one can consider some of the entangled possibilities that remained. Perhaps Mr Krishnan's sons

[134] Note by IC Section (undated), File 20/98/57- IC, NAI
[135] Letter from A. N. G. Bone to E. R. G. Kidd, 19.11.59, DO 35/10294, TNA
[136] A.N.G Bone to E.R.G Kidd, DO 35/10294, TNA
[137] A. N. G. Bone to E. R. G. Kidd, DO 35/10294, TNA
[138] Telegram from CRO to A. N. G. Bone, DO 35/10294, TNA

were granted some form of temporary travel document; perhaps Indian officials accepted the CRO interpretation, enabling the family to migrate to Singapore – the father a UKC citizen and sons Indian citizens. Perhaps, more worryingly, the minors remained stateless. Even in a clearly concerned letter in support of the case, Bone nevertheless signalled the oddity of Krishnan's status as a UKC citizen: Krishnan, he pointed out, 'speaks little, if any, English through the medium of a friend of his who speaks far too much!'. Bone couldn't resist gesturing to the peculiarity of Krishnan's vocabulary (and indeed his status as UKC citizen) in describing his full name: 'Mr Kathilal Sankaran Krishnan (Kazhimbram) … the latter is his "native place".'[139] One can only imagine the poignancy of this 'native place' in rural Kerala for a man whose life crisscrossed India, Ceylon, Singapore, the United Kingdom and still stared at the prospect of statelessness for his children.

CONCLUSION

The 'eternal' making of Indian citizenship legislation was perhaps inevitable, given the enormous scale of the task undertaken to unravel multiple claims of identity and citizenship shaped by Empire. Indeed even as officials frequently flagged concerns that the general public might find it difficult to understand these provisions for citizenship, their internal correspondence makes it amply clear that these bureaucrats were themselves often befuddled by the vast scale and complexities of implementing the law on citizenship. Divergent understandings of the law's practical application to different cases persisted not just between British and Indian officials, but just as much between Indian officials – in some ways facilitating the convenient suggestion that individual bureaucrats should decide each case 'by its merits' as a means of reconciling contrasting interpretations of the citizenship law. The haze within which these issues were mired is most clearly evident in the widespread confusion over the status of Indians as British subjects after independence – in part due to the deliberate policy of Indian officials to avoid any focus on this emotive topic but very much also due to the overwhelming complexity of the numerous provisions of the BNA. In parliamentary debates especially, many prominent ministers frequently denied that Indians were British subjects. When asked during a debate on the citizenship bill if the BNA conferred British subject status to Indians, B. N. Datar, deputy Home Minister, claimed that the BNA was not applicable to India and there was 'no question of Indians being British subjects or citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies', while the Home Minister Govind Ballabh Pant claimed

[139] A. N. G. Bone to E. R. G. Kidd, DO 35/10294, TNA

that Indians were not British subjects since they did not take any oath of allegiance to the Crown.[140] Responding to an uproar in Parliament about a junior UK minister's reference to Indians as 'British subjects', Nehru himself claimed that this 'was not correct of course … nobody in the wide world who has any knowledge of the facts considers any Indian as a British subject'.[141] Yet this was, of course, not the case.

The fact that Indians were British subjects under the BNA considerably impacted their status and produced entangled citizens: Indians navigating overlapping citizenship frameworks variously found that they were eligible for Indian citizenship, potentially even qualifying for dual nationality, but were almost just as likely to be told that they did not qualify within any citizenship rubric. Far from being a decisive strategy whereby the Government of India defined Indian citizenship as territorially-bounded with no space for its diaspora, I have shown that the drafting of Indian citizenship was a messy, even paradoxical process that was anything *but* a clean break between the Indian state and its overseas Indian communities. Not only were overseas Indians eligible to register for Indian citizenship, the Indian state was closely involved in engaging with the British government and other Commonwealth countries regarding their legal status. The Indian state's seemingly contradictory stance towards its overseas communities can be better understood in the context of the widespread crises of citizenship encountered by Indians in countries such as Ceylon, Burma and Malaya immediately after Indian independence. Framed within this scenario, India's citizenship policy was more concerned with preventing the statelessness, discrimination and forced repatriation of overseas Indians from their countries of settlement than necessarily with granting them Indian citizenship. That is, Indian citizenship would be provided as a last resort if Indians were denied citizenship of their 'host countries' – the latter more likely to protect them against discrimination. As the Home Secretary pointed out in a letter:

> I agree that persons of Indian origin residing in other countries should be encouraged to acquire Indian citizenship by registration. If however they have permanently settled in other countries and there is no bar to their being recognized as citizens of such countries, it would be in their interest to acquire

[140]Quoted in 'Citizenship Bill referred to joint select body: Special treatment for refugees,' *Hindustan Times*, 10 Aug 1955.
[141] Ward, *Untied Kingdom*.

> the status of citizenship there so that they may enjoy full rights and privileges available to other citizens of such countries.[142]

But as the imprint of Empire producing these entanglements of citizenship vividly illustrates, the task of differentiating between 'origins', 'interests' and 'citizens' was rarely so clear cut.

[142] Note by Home Secretary, 14.8.57, 'The Citizenship Rules, 1956', NAI

3

PERFORMING POSTCOLONIAL DIPLOMACY

OVERSEAS INDIANS AND THE AFTERLIVES OF INDENTURE

The mobility of Indian indentured labourers and other emigrants produced a distinct yet entangled realm of overseas Indians across British colonial territories. This chapter examines this unique realm as integral to the making and practice of postcolonial Indian diplomacy, imbued with the afterlives of indenture that shaped Indian ideas of the international and claims to diplomatic status. As we will see, the contested creation of a diplomatic infrastructure in colonial territories ranging from British Guiana to East Africa was an articulation of India's diplomatic stature derived from its potential to know, mediate and represent significant overseas Indian populations. The quest for Indian diplomatic representation was inseparable from attempts to define the status of these overseas Indians, trapped in limbo between multiple possibilities of nationality and citizenship. In theory, the Government of India's jurisdiction over Indian communities was demarcated using the criterion of domicile as a temporary measure until Indian citizenship legislation was enacted in 1955. This was, however, rarely well defined, providing Indian representatives considerable scope for interpretation and enabling British paranoia about their political motives. Indeed, as this chapter will show, Indian diplomatic representation was accepted only on the precondition of strict adherence to instructions formulated by British officials: a diplomatic procedure without precedence for a Commonwealth Dominion. Yet Indian officials sought to navigate these restrictions through a range of narratives utilising the colonial Indian state's interventionist role in governing migration as historical precedent and leveraging the unique diplomatic space provided within the 'Commonwealth family'.

The establishment of an Indian diplomatic network in colonial territories was a process that reiterated Indian exceptionalism in both British and Indian eyes. For the British, Indian diplomatic initiatives in these regions were reflective of a plucky upstart capitalizing on a sub-imperial legacy, at best overstepping diplomatic limits in immature ways and at worst potentially harbouring expansionist agendas. For the Indians, this was an opportunity to realize their sovereign status and perform postcolonial diplomacy as the preeminent diplomatic actor in colonial regions: befitting their self-perception as the

'leader of the Third World', vastly superior to both the African native and the much-maligned Indian 'coolie' who had long been regarded as bringing shame to India's international reputation. This chapter is thereby concerned with the complex relationship between the Indian state and its overseas communities – a dynamic that had great consequences for both the status of these overseas Indians, as we have seen in the previous chapter, and the international status of India as a diplomatic actor. The Government of India's stance calling on overseas Indians to identify with their countries of residence has been taken to imply a 'distance' from the diaspora constructed by a territorializing state at the brink of independence.[1] Yet, at very much the same time, as we shall see, India articulated its claim to diplomatic status on the basis of 'representing' Indian populations in colonial territories. This was a complex, even contradictory process wherein the government of India engaged with its overseas communities in ways that were defined by India's perception of the civilizational and political status of their territories of residence. Drawing on vocabularies of indenture by representing these Indian communities as poor, illiterate and in need of the Government of India's expertise, India established diplomatic networks in far-flung colonial territories.

This was a unique accomplishment for a postcolonial state that proclaimed its responsibility to spread political consciousness in what it perceived as the backward and naïve regions of British colonies in Africa and the Caribbean. While they called upon overseas Indians to integrate with native populations in their countries of residence – a strategy essential to guaranteeing the political rights that came with the citizenship of the country in question – they did not stop making representations on their behalf until such rights were guaranteed. Indeed even as strongly-worded statements from Nehru warned Indians that they could not expect to get 'any protection from us as against the people of that country … i.e. the Africans,'[2] British officials complained that they were 'bombarded by bitter and ill-natured protests about the alleged maltreatment of Indians in British colonies.'[3]

I argue that India's seemingly paradoxical actions can be best understood in terms of the very realities and limits of performing postcolonial diplomacy. While India was keen to draw on a diplomatic status derived from vast populations who required Indian advice

[1] Itty Abraham, *How India Became Territorial: Foreign Policy, Diaspora, Geopolitics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).
[2] Speech by Jawaharlal Nehru, 30.9.54, Quoted in file DO 35/5306, 'Government of India's interest in UK policy towards Indians in colonial territories', The National Archives at Kew (TNA hereafter)
[3] Note by F. S. Miles, 12.3.53, DO 35/5306, TNA

on how to become postcolonial, it was well aware of the limits of Indian influence and leverage to push for effective change. The Government of India was also disillusioned in some part by the dynamics of overseas Indian communities – seen as either poor, aging post-indenture communities embarrassingly in need of assistance, or merchants and traders accused of exploiting African natives and seemingly getting in the way of Indian proclamations of 'Afro-Asian solidarity'. This chapter will therefore highlight the need to go beyond notions of a 'break' between the Indian state and its diaspora in 1947 to explore the messy entanglements of diplomatic engagement with overseas Indians and its significant consequences. In so doing, it also widens the scope of British-Indian relations beyond the metropoles of London and Delhi to consider the realm of indenture and emigration in colonial territories as integral to postcolonial diplomacy.

INDENTURE, EMIGRATION AND THE MAKING OF INDIAN DIPLOMACY

A growing scholarship has sought to break away from the fixation with 1947 as the originary moment of Indian foreign policy. Drawing inspiration from histories of the Indian Ocean, scholars have focused on the sub-imperial, quasi-sovereign status of the British Raj and the ways in which the status of overseas Indians was central to the making of Indian diplomacy. Thus for Itty Abraham, the colonial state's decision to send officials to intervene in British colonies on behalf of indentured labourers in the early twentieth century was 'one of the first material signs of a foreign policy not subordinated to imperial needs and demands.'[4] Vineet Thakur meanwhile locates the presence and performance of Indian representatives Satyendra Sinha, V. S. Srinivasa Sastri and Tej Bahadur Sapru at imperial conferences, seeking to guarantee equal rights for all British subjects, as 'the inaugural moment of modern Indian diplomacy.'[5] Indeed, by seeking to act as a guardian for overseas Indians, 'the Raj was able to assert itself as a distinct diplomatic unit – a state, if not quite a sovereign one – within the British Empire-Commonwealth.'[6]

Much of this scholarship also focuses on South Africa, omnipresent in political discourse both before and after 1947 and seen as exemplifying both the precarious lives of

[4] Abraham, *How India Became Territorial*, 83.

[5] Vineet Thakur, 'Liberal, Liminal and Lost: India's First Diplomats and the Narrative of Foreign Policy,' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History,* 45, no. 2 (2017): 251

[6] Cees Heere, 'Among the Nations of the Empire: Migration Diplomacy and the Making of Indian Statehood, 1900-1923,' Paper presented at the 'Britain and the World' conference, University of Exeter, 2018.

overseas Indians and the origin of India's anticolonial, 'antiracial' foreign policy. Indian representatives raised concerns about the treatment of Indians in South Africa as early as the 1923 Imperial conference, much before the famous decision of the interim government to place this issue on the UN agenda in 1946: making it the first ever dispute to be taken to the General Assembly, wherein 'India inscribed racial discrimination onto the international agenda.'[7] As Varadarajan argues, this was widely seen as India announcing 'its presence on the international stage."[8] While this literature refers to the history of indenture, it does so either in terms of its brief relevance for more easily recognizable moments of diplomatic action at imperial conferences and the UN, or in terms of the newly-independent Indian state's decision to 'exclude' overseas Indians in 1947.[9] I argue instead that Indian diplomacy was replete with the afterlives of indenture well after independence: these histories of indenture and the 'shame' of being associated with the 'coolie' shaped Indian ideas of the 'international' and permeated Indian diplomatic discourse long after 1947. I do so by emphasizing the ways in which this shaped India's quest to gain diplomatic representation in the British colonial territories.

The dominant focus on South Africa in scholarship and public discourse has unfortunately led to the relative neglect of India's longstanding interest in British colonial territories with significant Indian populations, relegating these to the periphery of India's diplomatic history. While it is indeed clear that South Africa was a significant focus for Indian diplomacy, it is perhaps worth examining the ways in which South Africa was a metonym for India's larger stance towards the status of overseas Indians. Unlike South Africa, the colonial territories represented a particular realm that could be directly negotiated with Britain, especially given that they were part of the 'Commonwealth family', and carried with it the legacies of indenture. Drawing on inspiring scholarship highlighting the stories, memories and histories of indenture, often by descendants of indentured labourers, I am therefore interested in recovering this realm of indenture as integral to Indian diplomacy.[10]

---

[7] Lorna Lloyd, "'A Most Auspicious Beginning": The 1946 United Nations General Assembly and the Question of the Treatment of Indians in South Africa,' *Review of International Studies*, 16, no. 2 (1990):132

[8] Latha Varadarajan, *The Domestic Abroad: Diasporas in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 62

[9] The work of Hugh Tinker remains the most important exception to this. See Hugh Tinker, *Separate and Unequal: India and Indians in the British Commonwealth, 1920-1950*, (London: C. Hurst & Co, 1976)

[10] Notable examples of this vast scholarship include Brij V. Lal, 'Understanding the Indian indenture experience,' *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 21, no. s1 (1998): 215-237, Brij V. Lal, *Chalo Jahaji: On a journey through indenture in Fiji* (ANU E Press: 2012), Marina Carter and Khal Torabully, *Coolitude*,

While Radhika Mongia has skilfully highlighted the bureaucratic apparatus set up by the colonial state to 'micro-manage' and produce a 'system or regime of state control of Indian migration', I examine this regime as an early prototype of diplomatic representation – derived from the presence of Indian populations abroad and underpinned by the notion of 'protecting' indentured labourers.[11] The emigration of Indians to far-flung British colonial territories not just as indentured labourers, but increasingly also as traders, sojourners, settlers, and later 'skilled' and 'unskilled' workers, created multiple discourses of Indianness in the international realm. This produced 'British India and its indentured peripheries … as one integrated space', creating a distinct realm of overseas Indians in British colonial territories that would have longstanding consequences for Indian diplomacy.[12] Most importantly, the identity of the Indian state and other 'free' migrants were defined in relation to the status of the much-maligned 'coolies' – indentured labourers reduced to a term imbued with derogatory meanings of race, caste, and class, and thereby regarded as deeply harmful for India's reputation.[13]

Scholars has excavated the transnational histories of indenture and the legacies of the word 'coolie' – likely derived from the Tamil word for wages, but taking a life of its own as a deeply offensive racial slur used by Europeans to refer to Indian (and Chinese) labourers.[14] Descendants of indentured labourers have sought to reclaim the word 'coolie' while emphasising the ways in which the term carries with it the 'baggage of colonialism … the burdens of history'.[15] Drawing on their powerful scholarship, I argue that Indian diplomacy was irrevocably shaped by the experience of indenture. India's diplomatic status and ideas of the international realm were informed by the histories and afterlives of indenture, and the widely perceived shame of being associated with the 'coolie'. These indentured labourers were 'the first group of Indians abroad in any significant numbers': they were therefore India's first international representatives of

(London: Anthem Press, 2002), Gaiutra Bahadur, *Coolie Woman: The odyssey of indenture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013)

11 Radhika Viyas Mongia*, Indian Migration and Empire: A Colonial Genealogy of the Modern State.* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 58 and 61

12 Isabel Hofmeyr, 'The Complicating Sea: The Indian Ocean as Method,' *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East,* 32, no. 3, (2012): 584-590

13 In Chapter 4, I focus in detail on the intersections of caste, class and race that exemplified the afterlives of indenture in Indian diplomacy.

14 The term 'coolie' was also used by Africans during a period of increasing tensions. See Bahadur, *Coolie Woman*, and Carter and Torabully, *Coolitude.*

15 Bahadur, *Coolie Woman*, xxi

sorts, shaping the production of India as a diplomatic actor, creating a *locus standi* for Indian diplomacy in diverse parts of the world, and facilitating Indian diplomatic knowledge about these regions.[16] This was so even as India sought to erase the 'resilient coolie stain' on its reputation: as we shall see in detail in Chapters 4 and 5, this was a narrative that had longstanding consequences for the ways in which India defined the 'ideal' Indian eligible to travel abroad, shaping the postcolonial state's emigration and passport policies.[17]

The Indian state therefore sought to reconcile the diplomatic status derived from the vast spread of Indian communities across the world with the infamy and 'humiliation' of being identified with the coolie.[18] As Ashutosh Kumar has convincingly demonstrated, the 'overall exploitative nature of the indenture system was a secondary concern' for Indian nationalists whose anti-indenture campaigns were more concerned with the problem of indentured labourers as 'shameful' representatives of India in the international realm.[19] Indeed British supporters of the Indian cause such as Charles Freer Andrews and William Pearson stressed 'the relation of the Fiji Indian population to the place which India itself holds in the eyes of the civilized world', arguing that the selection of Indian indentured labour emigrants was therefore a question of shaping 'the world's attitude towards India.'[20] Reporting on the conditions of indentured labourers in Fiji in 1917, Andrews and Pearson noted the improvements in the colony and argued that the Indian community most needed 'a body of responsible and educated Indians, of good position in the Islands, who will be able to represent their community when fuller rights of citizenship are given.'[21] This, they hoped, would be aided by the transformed perceptions of India in the South Pacific:

> This change began … when (Rabindranath Tagore's) 'Gitanjali' was first published. We were often told in Australia how unique was the appeal which that one small volume made to thoughtful Australian men and women … The war

[16] Bahadur, *Coolie Woman*, xx
[17] Heena Mistry, 'Settler Citizenship and Indigeneity: Indians Overseas and the Claim to British Imperial Citizenship, 1918-1940,' Paper presented at the Global Conference on Indian Diaspora, The Hague, 2017
[18] Mistry, 'Settler Citizenship and Indigeneity'.
[19] Ashutosh Kumar*, Coolies of the Empire: Indentured Indians in the Sugar Colonies, 1830-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 205
[20] Fiona Paisley, 'Sexuality, Nationalism, and "Race": Humanitarian Debate about Indian Indenture in Fiji, 1910–18,' *Labour History,* 113 (2017), 195
[21] C. F. Andrews and W. W. Pearson, *Report on Indentured Labour in Fiji: An Independent Enquiry* (Calcutta: Star Printing Works, 1916), 57

> had carried forward this change of outlook towards India in quite a different direction ... Gallipoli had touched the masses … Stories of the bravery of the Gurkhas were on everybody's lips. The man in the street had 'discovered' India. *He had found out that India was not a land of downtrodden coolies, but a land of bravery and romance.*[22]

The anticolonial revolutionaries of the Ghadar movement too bristled at being racialised as 'coolies': 'The world calls us coolie. Why doesn't our flag fly anywhere?'[23] Indian nationalists campaigning to put an end to indenture sought to transcend the identity of 'coolies' – long regarded as weak, illiterate and immoral – by transforming the attacks against Indian women in plantations as 'an attack on the very pride of the newly emerging nation.'[24] By virtue of their status in the indentured system and their often-lower caste origins, these women had been earlier viewed in Indian nationalist discourse as morally bankrupt women best left in the fringes of overseas Indian populations. They were thus the very antithesis of the ideal Indian woman expected to participate in the nationalist struggle, a figure constructed in opposition to the 'coolie woman.'[25]

A wide-ranging scholarship has emphasized the agency and diverse social backgrounds of indentured labourers in order to go beyond widespread stereotypes of the 'coolie' as illiterate, gullible, passive Indians of the lowest class, caste origins.[26] These deeply problematic notions nevertheless had a longstanding resonance in Indian diplomacy – its vocabularies and practice were imbued with the afterlives of indenture, with the very presence of elite Indian diplomats seen as going a long way to confront notions of India as a land of coolies.[27] Thus even as the presence of indentured labourers across the world shaped perceptions of Indian identity, they also facilitated the creation of Indian diplomatic infrastructure – a process intertwined with the discourse on the coolie.

---

[22] Andrews and Pearson, *Report on Indentured Labour,* 57. Italics added.

[23] Maia Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 45

[24] Kumar, *Coolies of the Empire*, 218. For a moving exploration of the status of Indian women in the indenture system, see Gaiutra Bahadur's *Coolie Woman* and Brij V. Lal, 'Kunti's cry: Indentured women on Fiji plantations.' *Indian Economic & Social History Review,* 22, no. 1 (1985): 55-71.

[25] See Tejaswini Niranjana, *Mobilizing India: Women, music, and migration between India and Trinidad* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006)

[26] Crispin Bates, 'Some Thoughts on the Representation and Misrepresentation of the Colonial South Asian Labour Diaspora,' *South Asian Studies*, 33, no. 1, (2017), 7-22, Also see Lal, *Chalo Jahaji* , Kumar, *Coolies of the Empire* and Bahadur, *Coolie Woman.*

[27] I focus on this aspect in greater detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

The growing numbers of Indian labourers in British colonies and the widespread critique of indenture as a 'new system of slavery' resulted in the increasing intervention of the state to control emigration and 'protect' these labourers.[28] This took many forms, including the appointment of 'Coolie Agents' – later known as 'Protectors of Indian Immigrants.' The history of this terminological transition is itself quite telling: the 1872 'Coolie Commission' in Natal noted that Indians 'found the term Coolie "galling and a source of annoyance" and suggested that "Indian Immigrant" be the term used in place of Coolie and that "Protector of Indian Immigrants" replace Coolie Agent.'[29] While there is some debate on the effectiveness of the posts of Protector of Emigrants in Indian ports and the Protector of Indian Immigrants in areas of indenture (first manned by British officials), I view their very appointment and potential to be 'quasi-consuls' as significant.[30]

When unskilled labour emigration was formally banned with the Indian Emigration Act of 1922, this process of diplomatic representation for India – drawing on the presence of overseas Indians – was further codified. The legislation provided for the appointment of Agents for 'the purpose of safeguarding the interests of emigrants in any place outside British India.'[31] Sir V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, India's famed negotiator at the 1921 imperial conference who had been long concerned with the status of overseas Indians, was named the first Agent of the Government of India in South Africa in 1927.[32] Following Sastri, Indian Agents were appointed in Ceylon, Burma and Malaya: these officials were acting 'increasingly as consular officers in foreign lands, even though they remained within the British Asian empire.'[33] These three regions across the Bay of Bengal were at the heart of longstanding histories of migration and sojourning: as Sunil Amrith notes, 'from the beginning of organized Indian emigration in 1834 until 1940, well over 90 percent of all

---

[28] See Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830–1920,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974) On the state's interventionist role see Mongia, *Indian Migration and Empire,* Radhika Singha, 'The Great War and a 'Proper' Passport for the Colony: Border-Crossing in British India, c.1882–1922,' *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 50, no. 3, 289–315 and Radhika Singha, 'Passport, ticket, and india-rubber stamp: "The problem of the pauper pilgrim" in colonial India c. 1882–1925.' in *The Limits of British Colonial Control in South Asia: Spaces of Disorder in the Indian Ocean Region,* eds, Ashwini Tambe and Harald Fischer Tine, (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 59-93.

[29] Goolam Vahed, 'The Protector, Plantocracy, and Indentured Labour in Natal, 1860–1911,' *Pacific Historical Review*, 87, no. 1 (2018):109.

[30] Vahed, 'The Protector, Plantocracy, and Indentured Labour,' 101

[31] The text of the Indian Emigration Act of 1922 is available at http://legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/legislative_references/1922.pdf

[32] See Tinker, *Separate and Unequal*, 78-105

[33] Sunil S. Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal: The Furies of Nature and the Fortunes of Migrants,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 176

Indian emigrants went to Ceylon, Burma, and Malaya.'[34] Geographical proximity had thus shaped a 'habit' of circular migration where 'in a sense, Malaya, Burma, and Ceylon became a more permanent part of the South Indian rural landscape', while reiterating the unique status of this region as a space where both British India and its postcolonial successor state viewed themselves as 'naturally' dominant.[35]

This was especially so given Burma's unique position until 1937 as a province of the larger 'empire of the Raj' whose 'spheres of influence' extended as far as Aden.[36] This was the other side of India's international status, an 'India-centred web' that was a far cry from the servitude of the coolie in far-flung corners of the world.[37] This 'sub-imperial' status of India involved transplanting governing strategies and legal codes formulated in the Raj to other colonies, and relied on Indian military contribution and presence in colonial police forces across Malaya, Hong Kong, and Chinese treaty ports where 'British power had an Indian face'.[38] Thus other categories of overseas Indians were viewed in considerable contrast to the 'coolie' and seen as narrating very different, albeit still problematic discourses of Indian international identity. As Nehru pointed out in an important early conceptualization of Indian foreign policy in 1927:

> What is the position of the Indian in foreign countries today? Apart from a few students and others, he has gone either as a coolie or as a mercenary soldier on behalf of England. As a coolie he is looked down upon with contempt and as a hireling of the exploiters he is hated.[39]

Indeed versions of this coolie-mercenary binary of overseas Indians as representatives of different degrees of 'undesirability' would continue to haunt Indian diplomacy in various parts of the world. Indian Chettiar moneylenders in Burma, for instance, were regarded as usurpers of native land and held 'responsible for the present impoverishment in the

---

[34] Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal*, 104

[35] Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal*, 164

[36] See Robert J. Blyth, *The Empire of the Raj: India, eastern Africa and the Middle East, 1858–1947* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003)

[37] Thomas R. Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007)

[38] Isabella Jackson, 2012, 'The Raj on Nanjing Road: Sikh Policemen in Treaty Port Shanghai,' *Modern Asian Studies*, 46, no. 6, 1673

[39] Jawaharlal Nehru, 13 September 1927, 'A foreign policy for India', All India Congress Committee, File No. 8, 1927, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), New Delhi. Excerpts available at http://www.india-seminar.com/2018/704/704_from_nehru's_writings.htm

land.'[40] By the 1930s, violence broke out against them and other Indian immigrants seen as exemplifying India's own hegemonic position in the region: thus for Burmese nationalists, 'separation from India' was more crucial than 'freedom from British colonialism.'[41] In East Africa – famously referred to as 'an America for the Hindu', exceptional and distinct from any other colony where Indians had settled – Indian merchants stressed their 'pioneer work' in enabling British rule and 'positioned themselves as sub imperialist colonizers, asserting their rights as imperial citizens to gain parity with European settlers in political representation and land ownership.'[42] The intersections of race and class meant that while Indian labourers were central to the construction of the Ugandan railway, it was the potential of 'more proper' classes of Indian agriculturalists and merchants to be ideal settlers that received most emphasis. [43]

British officials too were instrumental in reiterating ideas of a 'better class' of Indians as ideal settlers in Africa: these arguments ranged from considerations of climatic conditions that they viewed as perfectly suited for Indian settlers, to the civilizational superiority of certain Indians who had the potential to share in the 'white man's burden' and act as 'valuable teachers of the Negro.'[44] In the words of Frederick Lugard, a colonial administrator in East Africa: 'It is not as imported coolie labour that I advocate the introduction of the Indian but as colonist and settler.'[45] In both East Africa and British Guiana, the claim of being a proficient settler was utilized to assert parity with European settlers and white Dominions and as an 'avenue for legitimizing the Indian aspirational claim to British Imperial citizenship.'[46] Perhaps the most famous scheme for Indian colonization was the British proposal for an Indian colony in Tanganyika after the First World War 'in exchange for India giving up its rights to free movement and settlement in the Dominions and across the empire.'[47] Though these colonization schemes did not materialize and often divided Indian opinion, despite support from influential leaders such as the Aga Khan and the nationalist leader Sarojini Naidu, they point to the persistence of attempts to produce new narratives of Indian identity that went past the

[40] Sean Turnell, 'The Chettiars in Burma', Working Paper no 512, Research Papers from Macquarie University available at https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/0e54/9506f5015c9ce84969c2193cb74ba62c9467.pdf

[41] Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal,* 187

[42] Sana Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya: The Politics of Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2015), 12

[43] Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya,* 33

[44] Metcalf, *Imperial Connections,* 122

[45] Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya,* 31

[46] Mistry, 'Settler Citizenship and Indigeneity', 6.

[47] Mistry, 'Settler Citizenship and Indigeneity', 3. Also see Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya* for more details on this scheme.

infamy of the coolie. This ambiguous position for India as both colonized and colonizer and, drawing on discourses of Indian civilizational exceptionalism, as intermediary between black and white had continuing resonance in India's self-perception of its role as a 'leader' of the third world.[48]

INDENTURE, IDENTITY AND THE SEARCH FOR 'GREATER INDIA'

At much the same time in the early twentieth century, Indian intellectuals were keen to recover what they viewed as the long-suppressed history of India's dominance as an international actor: as a virile colonial power spreading Indian civilisation in regions of South East Asia and producing 'Greater India.'[49] The leading proponent of such theorisations was the 'Greater India Society' in Calcutta that comprised leading historians and intellectuals of the time who drew on the scholarship of French Indologists such as Sylvain Lévi, while departing from their work in significant ways. The term itself no doubt borrows from the term 'Greater Britain' coined by Charles Dilke in 1868 to refer to Britain and its settler colonies, an Anglo-Saxon conception that had little space for other parts of the Empire.[50] India was a significant point of reference for John Seeley, another famous exponent of Greater Britain, if only to delineate its once-great civilisation as now 'inorganic', hopelessly left behind, and unsuited for inclusion on par with the white settler colonies.[51]

In stark contrast, the Indian intellectual rediscovery of 'Greater India' and their reading of Asian history as one dominated by the creation of 'Indic culture colonies' aimed to dispel widespread notions of Indians as docile, effeminate coolies, seemingly afraid to cross the *kaala paani* and engage with the world. This was an exercise very much shaped by the expediencies of the times: India's glorious supranational past was thereby seen as 'pre-figuring … the presence of South Asian migrants in other Eastern and also Western lands.'[52] The meanings of Greater India were evolved to suit both Hindu nationalist and

---

[48] Both Aiyar and Metcalf point to India's curious dual position. See Aiyar*, Indians in Kenya* and Metcalf, *Imperial Connections.*

[49] Susan Bayly, 'Imagining "Greater India": French and Indian visions of colonialism in the Indic mode,' *Modern Asian Studies,* 38, no. 3 (2004): 703-744. For a more recent analysis of the various interpretations of 'Greater India', see Jayashree Vivekanandan, 'Indianisation or indigenisation? Greater India and the politics of cultural diffusionism,' *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 56, no. 1 (2018): 1-21, DOI:10.1080/14662043.2018.1411232

[50] James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 457

[51] Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 172

[52] Bayly, 'Imagining "Greater India"', 713

more secular versions, evident from both Rabindranath Tagore and Jawaharlal Nehru's engagement with its history.

Tagore, who was the mentor of many of the intellectuals who founded the Greater India Society, set off on a journey to Java in 1927 to 'see the signs of the history of India's entry into the universal.'[53] While the moving poems he composed during his trip are a clear indication of the impact of this voyage 'in search of Greater India', Sugata Bose convincingly argues that Tagore made 'a rather self-conscious attempt to downplay the episodes of Indian military aggression against Southeast Asia in an attempt to highlight the theme of cultural exchange.'[54] This is evident, although perhaps to a somewhat lesser degree, in Nehru's enthusiastic reading of India's past in his seminal book *The Discovery of India*, written while in prison between 1942 and 1946.[55] While its breathless prose details the several 'waves of colonization' from India to South East Asia and the fact that 'even as far as Madagascar the current language is Indonesian with a mixture of Sanskrit words', Nehru's exploration of 'Greater India' nevertheless sought to reconcile two somewhat competing impulses.[56] Even as Nehru established that the early Indians were powerful colonizers with a strong military history, he sought to temper this by asserting the largely cultural and civilizational nature of this past of 'peaceful penetration'.[57] Indeed while he argued that 'the military exploits of these early Indian colonists are important … throwing light on certain aspects of the Indian character and genius which have hitherto not been appreciated', he also pointed out that their true greatness lay in 'the rich civilization they built up in their colonies and which endured for over a thousand years.'[58] Yet it is amply clear in his text that the great value of these 'discoveries' about Indian history lay in the possibilities it offered an India inching towards independence. The engagement with histories of 'Greater India' relied on reassuring evidence of a glorious expansionist past at a time of great weakness: 'to know and understand India one has to travel far in time and space, to forget for a while her present condition with all its misery and narrowness and horror, and to have glimpses of what she was and what she did.'[59] This was especially important since these achievements did not pertain only to the intellectual realm, but was proof that 'if India was great in thought

[53] Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 245
[54] Bose, *A Hundred Horizons*, 259
[55] Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2008)
[56] Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 213
[57] Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 215
[58] Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 211-215
[59] Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 211

and philosophy, she was equally great in action.'[60] Most importantly, the recovery of this history was central to Nehru's ideas of India's future as an international actor:

> I remember when I first read, about fifteen years ago ... how amazed I was and how excited I became. New panoramas opened out before me, new perspectives of history, new conceptions of India's past, and I had to adjust all my thinking and previous notions to them. Champa, Cambodia and Angkor, Srivijaya and Majapahit suddenly rose out of the void, took living shape, vibrant with that instinctive feeling which makes the past touch the present.[61]

These excited imaginations of 'Greater India' both drew on and in turn inspired the prevalence of this term in regions across the world that comprised of significant overseas Indian populations. In his autobiography titled *Life in Greater India* published in 1984, the Mauritian writer and political activist Basdeo Bissoondoyal argued that it was the emigration of Indian labourers to colonial territories that inspired the articulations of the Greater India society: 'when labourers were sent from India to Bourbon or La Reunion, Mauritius, several parts of Africa, the Fiji Islands, British Guiana (Guyana), Trinidad and some other countries, it did not occur to anyone that the countries of their adoption would remind some scholars in Calcutta of the countries of East Asia.'[62] While drawing on a very different history of Indian expansionism in South East Asia, his reading relied on the presence of overseas Indian communities as carriers of Indianness, creating new spaces of Greater India. This pointed to the continued existence of a 'Further India' or 'Greater India' stretching across the colonial territories where Indian labourers had settled: Mauritius, Fiji and Guiana were therefore, in his words, newer 'countries of Greater India'.[63] For Bissoondoyal, far-flung colonies with diverse histories were nevertheless all united within this rubric: indeed there was a 'striking resemblance between one family and another so far as Greater India goes.'[64]

South Africa too was conceptualized as an important part of the realm of 'Greater India', central to the making of Indianness. As Hofmeyr has argued in the case of Gandhi's 'experiments' in South Africa, the cosmopolitan world of Johannesburg enabled the production of his idea of India 'in a way that was not possible on the vast sub-continent

[60] Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 211
[61] Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 212
[62] Basdeo Bissoondoyal, *Life in Greater India* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan,1984), i
[63] Bissoondoyal, *Life in Greater India*, 29
[64] Bissoondoyal, *Life in Greater India*, iv

itself'.[65] Gandhi united disparate groups by identifying them all as 'Indian', while still placing some categories of Indians – especially the colonial-born descendants of indentured labourers – at the very margins of this Indian identity.[66] Meanwhile, many Indo-Caribbeans of the time saw little dissonance in reiterating their attachment to India, while articulating their contributions to Caribbean society and the advantages gained by emigrating from India. As Peter Ruhomon, writing about the 'Building of Greater India', noted, 'What contributions may not Colonial Indians make to the Motherland, with their wealth of experience, born of contact with Western influence and Western civilization!'[67] Indeed even as these overseas Indians sought to overcome the history of indenture 'which had emasculated the character of our fathers and weakened the fibres of their national manhood' by drawing strength from ideas of India's civilizational greatness, some were conscious of the rose-tinted glasses through which they harkened back to an imagined India.[68] Articulating the 'diasporic experience … (as) an improvement on the original', they nevertheless often deferred to the much-needed approval of 'subcontinental Indians' regarding the progress made by overseas Indians.[69] Even as they were assured that they had 'done Mother India proud', some delegates from India such as Maharaj Kunwar Singh warned them about the precarious realities of life in India. As Clem Seecharan notes:

> This India was not what most Indo-Guyanese wanted to know because it was what they or their parents or grandparents had fled from. It spoke of poverty, backwardness and caste bigotry; they preferred to cultivate an India of ancient glory and unimpeachable moral ascendancy, high learning and chivalry. Maharaj Singh's India was too close to the bone; it reminded India-born Indians of their real India, which they had learnt to forget.[70]

Discourses of 'Greater India' thus exemplified the ways in which the legacies of indenture and the status of overseas Indians was navigated. Excavating grand narratives

---

[65] Isabel Hofmeyr, 'Seeking Empire, Finding Nation: Gandhi and "Indianness" in South Africa,' in *Routledge Handbook of the South Asian diaspora,* eds, Joya Chatterji and David Washbrook (New York: Routledge, 2013), 153-65.

[66] Hofmeyr, 'Seeking Empire, Finding Nation,' 153-65.

[67] Lisa Outar, 'Tropical longing: the quest for India in the early twentieth-century Caribbean,' *South Asian History and Culture*, 2, no. 4, (2011), 468

[68] Clem Seecharan, *Mother India's Shadow Over El Dorado: Indo-Guyanese Politics and Identity, 1890s-1930s* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2011), 270

[69] Outar, 'Tropical Longing,' 469

[70] Seecharan, *Mother India's Shadow*, 276

of Indian civilisation and cultural expansionism of the past – the military aspects were stressed as and when required – helped in drafting a long and glorious history of India's international status and 'entry into the universal', as Tagore put it.[71] In so doing, the reputation of the 'coolie class' could be replaced by an imagination of the 'better class' of Indians as legatees of a grand Indian dominance, 'future agents of an Indian-led mission of pan-Asian cultural renewal.'[72] Such notions however no doubt added ballast to the rise of anti-Indian sentiment in south East Asia in particular. Most importantly, notions of the colonies of indenture as constituent nations of a 'Greater India' served to intertwine overseas Indians with India itself, in complex and often problematic ways.

THE QUEST FOR INDIAN DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATION IN THE COLONIES

The Indian Ministry of External Affairs' annual report for 1948-49 celebrated 'the successful conclusion of twelve years' negotiations' with the British government to establish Indian missions in British East Africa, Mauritius, Fiji and the British West Indies in 1948.[73] Far from being a matter of bureaucratic formality, the establishment of Indian diplomatic representation in British colonial territories was a deeply contested process marked by the studied reluctance of British officials, especially the Colonial Office, to recognize India as a sovereign actor fully entitled to diplomatic status.[74] Moreover, the Government of India's efforts to perform postcolonial diplomacy in these regions had to be reconciled with the limits of India's locus standi over overseas Indians whose entangled nationality and citizenship status was, as we have seen in the previous chapter, long debated.

In November of 1946, A. V. Pai, Secretary to the interim Government of India wrote to the Commonwealth Relations Office about a topic that had been long discussed: the appointment of Indian Agents in the British colonial territories of East Africa, Fiji, Mauritius, the West Indies and British Guiana.[75] As Pai noted, this subject had been debated at least since 1936 when a trade commissioner was appointed in East Africa, and reiterated in 1943 and 1945 in the context of requests to appoint an Indian agent in

[71] Bose, *A Hundred Horizons*, 245

[72] Bayly, 'Imagining Greater India,' 729

[73] Annual report of the Ministry of External Affairs, 1948-49. Available at https://mealib.nic.in/?pdf2475?000

[74] For a brief, descriptive account of this, see Tinker, *Separate and Unequal*, 313-316

[75] Letter from A. V. Pai to the Secretary of State for India, 27.11.46, CO 537/2044, 'Appointment of Indian Agents in the colonies, TNA

British Guiana and the British West Indies respectively. Temporary compromises had been reached with the appointment of a British officer with 'special Indian experience' and knowledge of Indian languages in Fiji, and delegations sent to Mauritius to report on the problems of Indian labour.[76] In these representations, Indian officials had outlined their 'special responsibility' vis-à-vis overseas communities in colonial regions as derived from the fact that Indians 'had not always secured local representation and were politically helpless.'[77] These narratives relied on a perception of the colonial realm and its indentured Indian populations as politically and socioculturally naïve, at best, and in need of expert Indian guidance on achieving political awareness. Pai argued that Indian agents would be 'specially instructed to promote friendly relations and contacts with all other communities and to inculcate among Indians the constitutional principle that it was to the colonial government that they must look for ultimate relief.'[78]

Pre-empting concerns by acknowledging the Colonial Office view that such appointments were 'likely to encourage separatist tendencies among the Indian communities', Pai noted that this was neither the intention of the Indian government nor an issue that should 'be given weight' any longer, given India's changing political and diplomatic status. India was now charting its diplomatic networks both within and beyond the Commonwealth: in addition to some of its earliest representatives appointed in Malaya, Ceylon and Burma, India had exchanged High Commissioners with Australia and was to do so with Canada shortly. Pai noted that India was therefore anxious for 'even closer contacts' with the countries and colonies of the Commonwealth, expressing interest in sending a delegation to prepare the groundwork for diplomatic representation in colonial territories.[79] Drawing on the precedents set by the appointments of Indian 'agents' and trade Commissioners before 1947 and the unique possibilities offered by Commonwealth membership, India articulated its claim to diplomatic status as merely following in this established, longstanding tradition. This nod to historical precedent was an attempt to assert Indian sovereignty without raising fears of undue influence. Seeking to circumvent strict restrictions over the category of people they could represent, Indian officials deftly argued that their locus standi was not necessarily based on the status of overseas Indians, but was derived from the legitimate concern of the people of India for their overseas counterparts. They argued that 'public interest in the welfare of Indian

[76] Note addressed to Cohen, Beckett and Sidebotham, 14.1.47, CO 537/2044, TNA
[77] Note addressed to Cohen, Beckett and Sidebotham, 14.1.47, CO 537/2044, TNA
[78] A.V. Pai to Secretary of State for India, 27.11.46, CO 537/2044, TNA
[79] A. V. Pai to Secretary of State for India, 27.11.46, CO 537/2044, TNA

communities overseas was increasing … and the Government of India were finding themselves handicapped in discharging their responsibilities to the public in India' without the appointment of Agents who would provide 'authentic and up to date information.'[80]

This was an argument utilised even in the case of politically active Indian communities who were represented in legislative councils in colonial territories and were regarded as nationals of the colonies in question – a category of Indians British officials were keen to position as outside the purview of Indian diplomacy. As Pai noted, the Government of India would 'nevertheless …. like to appoint a representative there mainly with a view to maintaining general contacts with and keeping themselves informed of the conditions of the Indian community there, as well as to establish friendly relations with the government.'[81] In its attempt to walk the thin line between India's responsibility towards overseas Indians and the accusations of expansionism that came with it, the government of India constructed a narrative of its inherent right to diplomatic representation not just as a soon-to-be postcolonial nation but also, especially, as a part of the Commonwealth.

For British officials, the Indian quest for diplomatic representation was an unpleasant exercise in dealing with a state that was viewed – to varying degrees – as a postcolonial nation unable to exercise restraint in its diplomatic practice, a former sub-imperial state harbouring highly political if not outright expansionist ambitions, and a former colony approaching Dominion status, thereby entitled to the privileges that came with it. India's claim to diplomatic status was the cause of much internal debate and difference between the Colonial Office and the Commonwealth Relations Office as to the motives of Indian appointments in British colonial territories that comprised substantial Indian populations.

India's diplomatic presence in these colonial regions would be exceptional in significant ways – few Dominions had until then exercised their right to diplomatic representation in colonial territories and few countries could claim the kind of influence India derived from its widely dispersed populations in these areas.[82] Moreover, as the first former colony to gain such diplomatic status, India's presence was viewed by British officials as

[80] A. V. Pai to Secretary of State for India, 27.11.46, CO 537/2044, TNA

[81] A. V. Pai to Secretary of State for India, 27.11.46, CO 537/2044, TNA

[82] Australia had appointed Commissioners only in Ceylon and Malaya, while South Africa had a Commissioner in East Africa.

'particularly embarrassing in those colonies such as Fiji and Mauritius where the population of Indian race is in a majority.'[83] Despite widespread discomfort about the appointment of Indian agents across the British colonial world, there was however grudging acknowledgement that a nation approaching Dominion status – regardless of doubts about India remaining in the Commonwealth – was entitled to diplomatic representation.[84] Yet British officials attempted to stall over the question of Indian diplomatic appointments until there was more clarity over India's political future and the date of drafting citizenship legislations that would address the status of Indians domiciled in British colonies.[85]

A persistent lack of response from the British government over the issue soon rankled Indian officials, who were under increasing political pressure to act on behalf of overseas Indian communities. In February 1947, Pandit H. N. Kunzru moved a resolution in the Council of State recommending that immediate steps be taken to 'a) secure the appointment of Agents of the Government of India in Trinidad, British Guiana and Fiji and b) promote the cultural and economic interests of the Indians living there.'[86] Responding to the resolution, Nehru bemoaned India's weakness as an international actor, helpless in the face of silence from the British government despite several reminders:

> It does not matter if you send one letter to His Majesty's Government in London about it or a hundred letters … One gets a little tired of repeating demands when they are not met … The fact of the matter is that this is governed largely by other considerations, not by the letters and telegrams we send to the British government but by the strong arm that India may possess at the moment. I hope the time may come – and that before long – when India's strong arm will extend to all her children wherever they live in this world and protect and succour them there.[87]

Pointing to India's success against South Africa in the United Nations as a more hopeful

[83] Note by A. Grantham, 11.6.47, CO 537/2044, TNA
[84] Note by J. S. Bennett, 9.6.47, CO 537/2044, TNA
[85] Unsigned handwritten memo dated 1.2.47, CO 537/2044, TNA
[86] Resolution quoted in a confidential telegram from Governor General (CRO) New Delhi to Secretary of State for India, 3.3.47, CO 537/2044, TNA
[87] Nehru's speech in the Council of State, 20 February 1947, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (SWJN hereafter), Second Series, Vol 2, (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1984)

example, Nehru argued that this diplomatic attitude helped 'Indians even in remote colonies, wherever they may be, in Fiji or Mauritius or British Guiana or other pars of the world.'[88] Indeed many other Dominions, he noted, resolved to 'remove' anti-Indian discrimination lest 'India became a nuisance again' in international forums.[89] Nehru went on to address the crux of the issue regarding overseas Indians: their entangled legal status and myriad possibilities of nationality and citizenship. While they were British subjects at the moment, overseas Indians would have to choose between Indian nationality and the nationality of their colony of residence:

> They cannot have it both ways. Whether they are in Burma or Ceylon or Guiana or Fiji, they have to choose whether they will be Indian nationals with the rights of Indian nationals and the right to claim protection from India or they will choose, remaining Indians of course, another nationality … Though of course he … will be culturally connected with India.[90]

Some scholars have understood these distinctions between political and cultural Indianness as clear-cut binaries. That is, the narrative that while India would continue to have "'cultural and humanitarian" interest in overseas Indians … if they wanted political voice, their best recourse was to become citizens of the countries they lived in.'[91] Highlighting the fault lines of intra-Asian solidarity made evident in the Asian Relations Conference of March 1947, Itty Abraham has pointed to the attitude of Indian delegates who 'expressed little concern about cutting ties with their overseas compatriots permanently' and the Indian state's eventual decision to 'distance' itself from its diaspora at the brink of independence.[92] As I have shown in the previous chapter, such conceptions do not recognize the entangled nature of citizenship for overseas Indians and the Government of India's continual engagement with these Indians well after 1947. Indeed at much the same time as the Asian Relations Conference, which Abraham reads as a moment marking the Indian state's decisive break with the diaspora, Nehru was stressing India's 'keen and constant interest in Indians who are resident in East Africa, West Indies (including British Guiana), Fiji and Mauritius' and its desire to appoint Indian agents in these areas.[93] How does one reconcile these dissonances in India's

[88] Nehru's speech in the Council of State, *SWJN*, Second Series, Vol 2
[89] Nehru's speech in the Council of State, *SWJN*, Second Series, Vol 2
[90] Nehru's speech in the Council of State, *SWJN*, Second Series, Vol 2
[91] Abraham, *How India Became Territorial*, 98
[92] Abraham, *How India Became Territorial*, 92
[93] Letter from Nehru to the Earl of Listowel, 20.6.47, CO 537/2044, TNA

attitude toward its overseas communities?

First, it is essential to recognize the heterogeneity and geographical spread of the Indian diaspora. Indian diplomacy perceived the British colonial territories of Fiji, Mauritius, East Africa, British Guiana etc. in ways that were very different from their understanding of the more 'politically advanced' regions of south East Asia where significant Indian populations were present. Moreover, the shared civilizational linkages of Asian countries was a far cry from the entangled realm of indenture, a space that comprised of African colonies regarded by Indian diplomats as inferior both in terms of civilizational and socio-political standing. Indeed, in his speech at the plenary session of the Asian Relations Conference, Nehru sought to speak for 'Asia' in articulating its role towards 'our suffering brethren in Africa'. He argued that Asians, as pioneers of anti-colonialism, had a 'special responsibility to the people of Africa' and 'must help them to take their rightful place in the human family.'[94] This theme defined India's policy towards African countries and their general perception that Africans were students who had much to learn from India's political consciousness and civilizational history - exemplified by the Government of India's scholarship schemes for Africans in the 1950s. This narrative 'positioned the global south and emergent African nations within it as clients of Indian technological expertise and the cultural/civilizational improvement that ostensibly came with it.'[95]

Moreover, the Indian communities in these colonial regions too were descendants of indentured labourers, the 'original girmitiyas' who, according to Abraham, were an 'embarrassing reminder of a time when India was weak and colonized' and therefore easy for the Indian state to exclude.[96] While Indian diplomatic discourse is indeed replete with narratives of indenture as a national shame, I depart from Abraham's reading to argue that these perceptions of 'backward' Indian communities identified them instead as in great need of the Government of India's expertise and facilitated *increasing diplomatic engagement.* As G. S. Bajpai noted while putting forth the case for Indian representatives in British colonies, 'the large majority of Indians in some of the territories were of poor intelligence and education' and the presence of Indian representatives who could engage

[94] Nehru's speech at the Asian Relations Conference, 23 March 1947, *SWJN*, Second Series, Vol 2,
[95] Antoinette Burton, *Africa in the Indian Imagination: Race and the Politics of Postcolonial Citation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 91
[96] Abraham, *How India Became Territorial,* 102

with them would benefit the colonial governments.[97]

Second, while expansionist and hegemonic motives of the Indian state were a concern both in South East Asia and colonial territories in Africa and elsewhere, their salience in terms of India's engagement with its overseas communities varied. Abraham argues that Indian officials sought to assuage fears of the Indian diaspora's presence as a potential fifth column in Asia: 'the political imperative of developing good relations with its Asian neighbors was the most direct reason for India's repudiation of its diaspora after independence.' [98] Similar concerns motivated British attempts to restrict Indian diplomatic involvement in the colonial territories – if not prohibit it altogether. This led to the negotiation of a strict set of rules governing the diplomatic activity of Indian representatives and attempting to delineate a small category of Indians that they could be responsible for. This was considered particularly necessary, given that India's diplomatic influence and stature in these regions was derived from the presence of significant Indian populations.

Finally, the entangled citizenship and nationality status of these Indians was central to these debates. As we have seen, Indians – both those in the colonies and in the territory of India – were British subjects under the British Nationality Act of 1948 and in the case of overseas Indian communities especially, their legal status was unclear until the Indian citizenship act came into effect in 1955 and even after. Indian diplomatic attempts to engage with these Indians in colonial territories was mediated by this limbo about their status – providing a narrow space for negotiation, even as British officials sought to reign in the Government of India's jurisdiction over Indian communities. The fact that the government of India often called on these overseas Indians in colonies to identify with their countries of residence in order to access the full political rights they were entitled to, did not by itself preclude diplomatic engagement with the Indian state. It is worth highlighting Nehru's reference to Indians in South Africa who were deemed South African nationals and yet considered the legitimate objects of India's diplomatic initiatives:

> We did not claim them to be Indian nationals, but because of the discrimination against them, because of the ill-treatment given to them, we felt that certain

[97] Inward telegram from India (HC), 26.11.47, CO 537/2044, TNA

[98] Abraham, *How India Became Territorial,* 98

> humanitarian standards were involved, India's honour was involved; *even though we did not consider them as Indian nationals in the strict sense of the word … we raised their question before the United Nations General Assembly*[99]

More than six months after the Government of India's first request for establishing diplomatic representation, Nehru himself wrote to the Secretary of State for India, the Earl of Listowel, stressing India's 'keen and constant interest' in Indians resident in the colonies and reiterating that India considered their diplomatic representation in these areas to be 'of the highest importance to the future relations of India and the Commonwealth.'[100] British officials hurriedly conveyed their agreement – in principle – to the appointment of Indian representatives in the colonies 'subject to agreement being reached about their precise status and functions.'[101] Defining these 'precise' rules to regulate Indian diplomatic appointments was a process with little in the way of precedent: indeed, the acknowledgement that 'Indians were asking for something which is a normal and recognized prerequisite of dominion status' did not tide over concerns unleashed by the potential of Indian diplomatic activity. Even as he ventured that a 'gentleman's agreement' was perhaps more ideal than a codified set of rules handed to India, J. S. Bennett of the Colonial Office noted the extent to which this would be a unique departure:

> I am informed that the functions of Dominion High Commissioners in London have never been defined and that this was quite deliberate ... Moreover, if there is to be any document defining the functions of a diplomatic or consular representative, this document must obviously emanate from the government which appoints him and not from the government which receives him. I do not think it would make a good impression on the Government of India or really assist the object we have in view ... but if we do not do this, I see no way of getting across the idea of a close definition of functions.[102]

British officials thus had a plethora of fears about Indian diplomacy, worrying especially that they might be dealt with in much the same way as South Africa: this was likely to place the UK in an 'extremely vulnerable' position, their "'crime" magnified tenfold in

[99] Nehru's speech in the Council of State, 20 February 1947, *SWJN*. Italics added.
[100] Nehru to Listowel, 20.6.47, CO 537/2044, TNA
[101] Listowel to Nehru, 18.7.1947, CO 537/2044, TNA
[102] Letter from J. S. Bennett to Poynton, 28.6.47, CO 537/2044, TNA

international eyes merely because the locus delicti was a colony and not a sovereign state.'[103] The South Africa example found much resonance in other departments too with one official in the UN department arguing that India's 'politics and emotionalism (had) defeated the legally-correct view' that as South African nationals, the status of Indians in South Africa was an internal 'domestic' issue.[104] He therefore cautioned against a similar scenario in British colonial territories where 'Indians both want to have their cake and eat it too, i.e. to be members of the British Commonwealth with full civic rights, including franchise, and to retain a right of appeal to India for support.'[105]

Officials sought to justify the unprecedented drafting of rules for Indian representatives in colonies as essential for a non-white state whose diplomatic behaviour they regarded as emotional, immature and problematic. As A. Campbell of the Colonial Office argued, 'we who have had much more experience in these matters than the government of India should be entitled to state what functions these Commissioners should perform.'[106] Thus India seemed to require a strict diplomatic lesson of sorts to prevent their overreach: unlike Britain's exercise of 'discretion as to the sort of things on which we see fit to make representations to the Indian government, the latter rarely seem to be deterred from claiming the right to interfere in even the most purely domestic matters involving Indians.'[107]

There was considerable agreement among the often-sparring Colonial Office and Commonwealth Relations Office that the appointment of Indian Agents was a stark impediment to the assimilation of Indian communities – already regarded as distinct and resisting integration – and prone to encouraging the 'local Indians to think of themselves as a self-contained national community.'[108] The ghosts of indentured labour, one official argued, were long gone:

> Indians in the colonies are either born colonials or immigrants taking up their livelihood and settled life in the colonies ... The danger of an 'Agent' is to encourage the 'communal' life and discourage the assimilation and common life we have been trying to build … In the past many Indians have treated their life in

[103] Unsigned handwritten memo dated 1.2.47, CO 537/2044, TNA
[104] Letter from R. H. S. Allen to A Campbell, 13.5.47, CO 537/2044 TNA
[105] Letter from R. H. S. Allen to A Campbell, 13.5.47, CO 537/2044 TNA
[106] Letter from A. Campbell to J. S. Bennett, 11.9.47, CO 537/2044 TNA
[107] Letter from A. N. Galsworthy to J. S. Bennett, J. H. Wallace, Sidebotham, 22.12.47, CO 537/2044 TNA
[108] Letter from A. Creech-Jones to Earl of Listowel, 30 June 1947, CO 537/2044 TNA

> the colony as a sojourn for making money, have returned or remitted their gains to India. As they share in the common life with all political and social rights of the territory, special protection is not called for.[109]

Moreover, the very terminology of 'Agents' troubled officials, even as they acknowledged the precedents of Indian agents appointed in the 1920s in Ceylon, Malaya and Burma and 'Protectors' of immigrants even earlier. This was a relic of the past, they argued, and instead suggested that titles of 'Consul', as in the case of China, or 'Commissioner', as in the case of old Commonwealth representatives, were better suited. Indeed in their view, 'the whole implication of an Agent is that there is an immigrant population in need of special protection: while there was such a population we did have 'Protectors' but the time for that has gone by.'[110] However, the historical status of Indian Agents in Malaya and Ceylon was a benchmark that both British and Indian officials would point to: as J. S. Bennett of the Colonial Office noted, the 'Indian government … would not accept less than has already been conceded to them' in these cases.[111] This was a particularly problematic precedent for the British given that 'the Indian representative in Malaya has already been recognized as having the duty of establishing close liaison with the Malayan governments in all matters affecting Indian interests and Indians of all classes' – not just those of persons 'with roots in India'.[112] It neither limited Indian representatives to consular functions nor necessarily guaranteed against the political interests of the Government of India.

Yet the question that most troubled British officials in their attempt to delimit the jurisdiction of Indian representatives was the issue of the nationality or citizenship status of Indians in the colonies. Given that British and Indian citizenship legislations were unlikely to be in effect immediately, officials relied on the criteria of domicile to define those 'permanently resident' as beyond India's locus standi.[113] This was no clear-cut classification either, as the Colonial Office's India committee noted: the distinction between those that were 'permanently resident' and 'the rest' who could be the Government of India's responsibility was likely to 'lead to some difficulty in interpreting it in practice ... there would be plenty of loopholes for an Indian representative who wanted to encourage genuine "local" Indians to look to Mother India while staying

[109] Note by A. Campbell dated 19 .6.47, CO 537/2044, TNA
[110] Unsigned handwritten note dated 17.1.47, CO 537/2044 ,TNA
[111] Letter from J. S. Bennett to Poynton, 28.6.47, CO 537/2044, TNA
[112] Letter from J. S. Bennett to Poynton, 28.6.47, CO 537/2044, TNA
[113] Letter from Campbell to Galsworthy, 17.10.47, CO 537/2044, TNA

within the letter of the agreement.'[114] As the Indian Secretary General G. S. Bajpai argued when presented with a draft of instructions for Indian representatives, short of citizenship legislation cementing the status and definition of 'permanent resident', it would be 'extremely difficult, if not impossible, to define with precision those for whose interests draft instructions contemplated that representatives should properly be responsible.'[115] Moreover, the existing status of 'British subject' and India's continued membership of the Commonwealth made these questions harder to resolve. As Colonial Secretary, Sir Arthur Creech Jones argued:

> So long as India remains a part of the British Commonwealth, there is no short way on nationality grounds of distinguishing those local Indians in a colony who are genuine local residents and part of the local community, and those Indians who may just be, so to speak, visiting the territory. On any normal understanding of consular functions, the Indian representative ought really to confine himself to intervening with the local government on behalf of the latter class only. But all Indians are British subjects and I fear it will be very difficult to draw an effective line.[116]

These entanglements of identity and nationality shaped by Empire and reiterated within the Commonwealth framework provided India considerable leverage to engage with the status of overseas Indians in British colonial territories – not necessarily in terms of asserting their jurisdiction over these Indians but by recourse to India's position within the 'Commonwealth family'. Indeed British officials presciently noted that India staying in the Commonwealth would considerably complicate the question of citizenship more than a scenario of India's exit wherein Indians in colonial territories would have to choose clearly between Indian or British nationality.[117] Even as they were aware of these limitations, the need to create 'some line of demarcation … so that both Indian Commissioners and colonial governments may know where they are' led to a final set of rules drafted after much internal discussion between the Colonial Office and Commonwealth Relations Office.[118]

---

[114] Memo by IR dept, 21.7.47, CO 537/2044, TNA

[115] Inward telegram from India (HC), 26.11.47, CO 537/2044 TNA

[116] Letter from A. Creech-Jones to Earl of Listorel, 30.6.47, CO 537/2044 TNA

[117] Memo from Acheson dated 1.2.47, CO 537/2044, TNA

[118] Draft telegram for interdepartmental discussion from Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations to UK High Commissioner, New Delhi, 4.12.47, CO 537/2044, TNA

The formal set of instructions for Indian Commissioners were sent to the Government of India for approval in November 1947. These rules called on Indian representatives to limit themselves to consular, trade and administrative functions while not intervening in local politics.[119] Their diplomatic focus was defined as a quasi-consular function, with British officials arguing that a wholly diplomatic representative could not be permitted in colonial territories. Directing all major political representations to be made to the British government rather than local colonial governments, the rules also required them to 'take the greatest care' that no separatist tendencies were fostered among Indians in colonial territories. Most importantly, the instructions defined the jurisdiction of Indian Commissioners as pertaining only to those Indians in the colonies who were there 'otherwise than for the purpose of permanent residence: you will not be the spokesman of Indians permanently resident' in the colony in question.[120] These were to be the guidelines defining Indian diplomatic conduct until citizenship laws came into effect. British officials argued that while India could send their Commissioners with any instructions of their choice, 'we will not recognize them as having functions wider than those defined in our draft.'[121]

Colonial Office officials vehemently resisted the 'unnecessarily weak'[122] stance of the Commonwealth Relations Office that the Government of India had a right to define the functions of its representatives and 'should be treated with every consideration' as a Dominion.[123] In a telling metaphor carrying with it the unflinching fury of Empire, deeply disdainful of the changing political circumstances, J. S. Bennett noted, 'we are not obliged to lie down flat under an Indian "diktat". If anything, UK should have the whip hand.'[124] Even the existence of these rules was of little comfort to these CO officials who argued that Indian diplomats were capable of bypassing them and it was only a matter of time before they sought to interfere in local politics. As Bennett argued, many of these diplomats were 'first-class lawyers … adept at contravening the spirit of the law while staying just within the letter of it.'[125] Despite the many questions about these rules and their vague definitions – 'permanent residence' would especially continue to rankle British officials, as we shall see – they provided useful grounds to insist on the recall of

[119] C. A. Gault to S. Dutt, 5.11.1947, CO 537/2044, TNA
[120] Letter from Bennett to Campbell, 11.9.47, CO 537/2044, TNA
[121] Letter from Bennett to Campbell, 11.9.47, CO 537/2044, TNA
[122] Letter from Bennett to Campbell, 11.9.47, CO 537/2044, TNA
[123] Letter from A. Campbell to Colonial Office officials, 13.9.47, CO 537/2044, TNA
[124] Handwritten note from J. S. Bennett to A. Campbell, 11.9.47, CO 537/2044, TNA
[125] Letter from J. S. Bennett to Poynton, 28.6.47, CO 537/2044, TNA

any diplomats diverging from the regulations. This would come to good use later in the case of East Africa where two senior Indian diplomats, including the Commissioner Apa Pant, were recalled after allegations of interfering in local politics.[126]

The agreement to enable the appointment of Indian Commissioners on the basis of a set of rules governing their functions was without precedent: British officials putting a positive spin on this noted that 'the whole idea of defining the functions of Indian representatives in the colonies by agreement between the two governments will be a novel experiment in Commonwealth relations.'[127] For Indian officials, the long-awaited approval of diplomatic representation was integral to its foreign policy objectives, despite being addled with rules they deemed excessive. By April 1948, the Indian government had selected its diplomatic representatives: Apa Pant was appointed Indian Commissioner to East Africa, Satya Charan Shastri to the West Indies, Dharam Yash Dev to Mauritius and Samuel Altaf Waiz to Fiji.[128] As we shall see, these appointments soon facilitated India's 'official', 'unofficial', cultural *and* indeed political engagement, crafting a preeminent diplomatic status for India in the colonial territories – much to the increasing paranoia of British officials and African nationalists. While cautiously toeing the line about the categories of Indians included in their jurisdiction, Indian diplomats made official representations to the British government on behalf of overseas Indians in the colonies, particularly regarding restrictive immigration legislations targeted against them. Their efforts were also complimented by 'unofficial' organizations working for the causes of overseas Indians such as the Brihad Bharatiya Samaj, whose delegations to colonial territories in Africa and South East Asia were sent under the auspices of the Indian government.

LIMITS AND POSSIBILITIES OF 'REPRESENTING' OVERSEAS INDIANS

In the previous chapter, we explored the Government of India's attempts to negotiate the entangled status of overseas Indians while drafting its 1955 Indian Citizenship Act. This process also had considerable consequences for the diplomatic activities of Indian representatives in colonial territories. By 1954, the Colonial Office had been making regular enquiries with their colonial governments regarding cases that had 'arisen locally involving the interpretation of the criterion of 'permanent resident'' in the instructions of

[126] For more details on Apa Pant's involvement in East Africa, see Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya*

[127] Memo by IR dept, 21.7.47, CO 537/2044, TNA

[128] Minutes of a Cabinet meeting, Cabinet Secretariat papers, 17 April 1948, *SWJN*, Second Series, Vol 6, (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1987)

Indian Commissioners', seeking to understand the workings of Indian representatives and their 'clientele'.[129] Most colonial governments reported back that few cases had arisen. Indeed even in cases where Indian Commissioners had made representations about those Indians who could qualify as 'permanently resident' and were therefore outside the Government of India's purview, these issues were often resolved with little problem.[130] Moreover, colonial officials argued that they had sufficient legal definitions drawn from local laws on whose basis 'permanent residence' could be interpreted in ways that would best suit them.

The workings of the Indian Commissioner and his engagement with Indian communities were closely monitored by CO officials who expressed great discomfort even at instances of Indian officials utilizing mobile cinema vans and libraries, or opening offices for their Information Services. Similar sentiments had been expressed by several officials who were keeping an eye on the profile of diplomats appointed as Agents, alleging that they were utilised to 'distract the loyalties of the East Indians from G. B. to India.'[131] E. M. West of the Colonial Office imaginatively proposed that the development of the Indian information services would aid the 'probable desire of the Indians to wage their own Cold war, i.e against South Africa in the receptive north African setting.'[132] While these activities did not sufficiently qualify as divergent from their stated instructions, West argued that 'the mere presence of Indian Commissioners in such territories is an irritant to race relations and a disturbing political factor.'[133] Ever the hardliner, he had long stressed that there was no need to treat the diplomatic status of Indians on par with other Commonwealth nations: the Indians were a special case, as the 'existence of the standard instructions of Indian commissioners testifies.'[134] From a narrative where the 'special' position of India as a diplomatic actor – given its significant overseas populations and newly postcolonial status – had been cited as necessitating a set of instructions for Indian Commissioners, British officials were now arguing that it was the existence of these distinct instructions that in some ways caused their 'special' status. To

[129] Savingram from the Secretary of State for the Colonies to the officers administering the Governments of Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika, Zanzibar, Mauritius, Hong Kong, Fiji, Aden, British Guiana, Jamaica and Trinidad, 18.6.54, CO 936/233, 'Appointment of Indian commissioners in the colonies: General Policy', TNA

[130] Savingram from the Governor of Uganda to Secretary of State for Colonies, 19.7.54, CO 936/233, TNA

[131] British official quoted in Deborah Sutton, 'Imagined sovereignty and the Indian subject: Partition and politics beyond the nation, 1948–1960', *Contemporary South Asia*, 19, no. 4 (2011), 412.

[132] Note by E. M. West, 16.9.54, CO 936/233, TNA

[133] Letter from E. M. West to R. C. Ormerod, 13.7.54, CO 936/233, TNA

[134] Letter from E. M. West to Mathieson, 7.10.54, CO 936/233, TNA

quote West:

> In practice there is very little consular work (except perhaps in the federation of Malaya) and very little trade-promotion by these Indian Commissioners. They spend most of their time establishing social, cultural and political (both legitimate and illegitimate) contacts in the territories to which they are appointed. The peculiar status of Indian commissioners in colonial territories is thus due not so much to their title but to the fact that they operate on these instructions.[135]

Their most pressing concern however was the diplomatic pre-eminence of India in colonial territories, having appointed Commissioners in all colonial territories except Gibraltar. As anxious cabinet deliberations noted, no other country had such diplomatic dominance: Canada, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand and Pakistan had tended to appoint more junior Trade Commissioners in many of these territories, with the exception of East Africa and Singapore where some of them had Commissioners.[136] J. S. Mernham of the Colonial Office summarised British concerns about India's diplomatic stature thus:

> We have always advised Governors that in view of the representational element in their Instructions, Indian Commissioners should be granted the privileges and immunities and the precedence given to foreign Consuls-General de carrier, and that furthermore on account of their Commonwealth status they should be given precedence in advance of Consuls-General .... We feel, however, that the influence which these representatives of the Government of India are gaining in territories with large populations of Indian origin is being materially assisted by the prestige attaching to their privileged position and the precedence which is publicly accorded to them[137]

India's rising diplomatic status derived from its significant overseas populations and membership of the Commonwealth was increasingly daunting for British officials, particularly in the heightened Cold War context. Indeed while demoting the Indian Commissioners would be impossible, officials resolved to balance Indian dominance by

[135] Note by E. M. West titled 'Status and Precedence of Indian Commissioners in Colonial Territories', 23.2.55, CO 936/233, TNA

[136] Letter from J. S. Mernham to F. A. K. Harrison, 16.3.55, CO 936/233, TNA

[137] Letter from J. S. Mernham to F. A. K. Harrison, 16.3.55, CO 936/233, TNA

calling on other Commonwealth governments to promote some of their Trade Commissioners to Commissioner status. Specific instructions detailing their functions – of the kind given to Indian and Pakistani commissioners – were deemed unnecessary even though their functions 'would in fact be similar.' Mernham expressed surprise that it had not occurred to Indian officials to ask if their Commissioners 'were the only ones with specific and restrictive instructions … the obvious answer is, of course, the special situation created by the existence of large communities of Indian origin in the territories concerned.'[138]

Drawing on the work done by Indian Commissioners while navigating these restrictive guidelines, Indian officials in the High Commission in London made consistent representations to the British government regarding issues affecting Indian communities in the colonies. Spearheaded by Krishna Menon who took a particular interest in these regions, Indian officials sought to address a range of immigration restrictions targeting the mobility of Indians into colonial territories such as Aden, Kenya, the Gold Coast, Gibraltar and the rights of Indians to be recognized as 'permanent residents' in these regions.[139] They also brought to the fore a range of issues of religious and cultural concern, such as the right of Hindus to cremate their dead in the West Indies and educational facilities for Indians in East Africa, while also objecting to anti-Indian propaganda in Aden.[140] Deploring the tendency of the Aden press to distinguish between Hindu and Muslim Indians (the former being targeted as 'aliens'), Indian officials successfully called on the British government to coordinate with the local government to put an end to such vicious activities.[141]

As diplomatic representatives speaking for their overseas communities while walking the thin line defining their acceptable jurisdiction over these Indians, Indian officials were in constant correspondence with their British counterparts who often complained of being 'bombarded' by aide memoires of protest in cases where the Indians had no locus standi. Menon – who had long been viewed with great suspicion in the context of the Cold War, due to his links with the Communist Party of Great Britain – was the focus of much of

[138] Letter from J. S. Mernham to F. A. K. Harrison, 16.3.55, CO 936/233, TNA

[139] File DO 35/3093, 'Indians and Pakistanis residing and employed overseas: Aden immigration rules; application to Indians memorandum by Krishna Menon, Indian High Commissioner to UK, to Oliver Lyttleton, Secretary of State for the Colonies', TNA

[140] Letter from W. A. Morris to G. P. Hampshire, 17.9.52, DO 35/5306, TNA

[141] Sir Paul Gore Booth to Sir Charles Johnston, 18.4.61, DO133/147, 'Situation of Indian communities in British colonies', TNA

the ire.[142] Alleging that Menon 'got much of his ammunition' regarding the treatment of Indians in British colonies 'not through the Indian government channels but from some of his extremist left wing contacts in London', officials celebrated the end of his term as High Commissioner.[143] While they anticipated a downturn in the barrage of complaints about the status of overseas Indians with his exit, they were nevertheless still negotiating representations from his replacement, P. N. Haksar, who made the most of India's status as a Commonwealth nation to push for action vis-à-vis overseas Indians in the colonies. Indeed the framework and leverage offered by the Commonwealth was central to Indian diplomatic representations and also manifest in the frequent tussle between the Colonial Office and the Commonwealth Relations Office to reconcile India's special status as a Commonwealth partner with the limits of its jurisdiction over 'local' or 'domestic' issues.

While scholars such as Lorna Lloyd have stressed the particularities of 'Commonwealth diplomacy' as a diplomatic system of its own, largely focusing on the unique dynamics between the old Commonwealth nations, it is worth considering the Commonwealth as an underlying framework for India's diplomacy with Britain.[144] The diplomatic space provided by the Commonwealth had long been held by proponents as one of the benefits of India's membership. This leverage was most evident when CRO officials sought to limit Indian interventions on behalf of overseas Indians by pointing out that other sovereign states like Italy, for example, would not seek to speak for its communities settled in Britain.[145] As Haksar skilfully retorted, the British government 'should presumably not want to treat the Indian government in the same way as a foreign government.'[146] Chastened British officials noted that 'we were all able to agree warmly that this was so, and that we are all in the Commonwealth family.' Indeed in the report of the meeting that made its way into the file, a handwritten note draws attention to Haksar's intervention while claiming 'I was about to add this qualification myself, but Mr Haksar made it for me!' Worried that they had missed a trick, CRO officials reiterated the 'Commonwealth family' phrase in a narrative more suited to their interests:

---

[142] For more on the numerous British and American suspicions regarding Krishna Menon, see Paul M. McGarr, "A Serious Menace to Security': British Intelligence, V. K. Krishna Menon and the Indian High Commission in London, 1947–52', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History,* 38, no. 3 (2010): 441-469 and Paul M. McGarr, "India's Rasputin'?: V. K. Krishna Menon and Anglo–American Misperceptions of Indian Foreign Policymaking, 1947–1964', *Diplomacy & Statecraft,* 22, no. 2 (2011): 239-260.

[143] Note by F. S. Miles, 12.3.53, DO 35/5306, TNA

[144] Lorna Lloyd, *Diplomacy with a difference: the Commonwealth Office of High Commissioner, 1880-2006* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2007) and Lorna Lloyd, '"Us and Them": The Changing Nature of Commonwealth Diplomacy, 1880-1973,' *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics,* 39, no. 3 (2001): 9-30.

[145] W. A. Morris' report of meeting with P. N. Haksar, 2.10.52, DO 35/5306, TNA

[146] W. A. Morris' report of meeting with P. N. Haksar, 2.10.52, DO 35/5306, TNA

> Although we intended to be firm over the point of principle, we had every desire to be helpful and cooperative towards another member of the Commonwealth family as long as they kept to the rules.[147]

The framing of Indian and Pakistani citizenship legislations – the latter was adopted in 1951 – brought with it the question of redefining the jurisdiction of Indian and Pakistani diplomatic representatives through citizenship rather than domicile as a term of reference. Even as they acknowledged the far more logical and clear basis provided by citizenship, British officials preferred the continuation of the existing definition until these countries themselves called for a change. Their predominant concern was the fact that the lure of Indian citizenship for Indians in the colonies would result in 'crystallising out a section of the community at a time when we were trying to develop a multi-racial community.'[148] This was so even as they acknowledged that there were several benefits for Indians who registered for citizenship of the United Kingdom and Colonies, even at the risk of losing Indian citizenship – UKC citizenship would, after all, guarantee their political rights in the colonies. This advantage, they gleefully noted, could cause 'the Indian Commissioner's sphere of influence … to contract'.[149]

THE BRIHAD BHARATIYA SAMAJ AND 'UNOFFICIAL' DIPLOMACY

Apart from diplomatic negotiations in London utilising the Commonwealth leverage and a diplomatic presence on the ground in the form of Commissioners, the Government of India also encouraged 'unofficial' delegations and organizations to engage with Indian communities in these regions. These were efforts to represent and speak for Indian communities in ways that the Commissioner was restricted from doing 'officially'. The work of Shri Brihad Bharatiya Samaj is perhaps the most vivid example of such objectives: founded in 1950 under A. B. Patel, an influential Indian leader in Kenya, an ad-hoc committee of the organization operated out of Bombay with the high-ranking Congress politician S. K. Patil as president. While Patil described the organization in a private conversation with colonial officials as 'a cross between Chatham House and the Overseas League,'[150] its main stated objective was the 'establishment of an organization

[147] W. A. Morris' report of meeting with P. N. Haksar, 2.10.52, DO 35/5306, TNA

[148] Memo by E. W. Putnam, 25.6.56, CO 936/233, TNA

[149] Memo by E. W. Putnam, 26.6.56, CO 936/233 TNA

[150] Telegram from the Acting Governor of Uganda to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 16.6.55, DO 35/5307, 'Activities of Shri Brihad, Bharatiya Samaj (Indian Overseas League): tour by its leader, S K Patel to East Africa and Fiji', TNA

which would render assistance to Indians from overseas countries during their sojourn in India, particularly at the important ports of Bombay, Madras and Calcutta and which would also serve as a cultural centre and an information bureau.'[151] The proposed centre – Brihad Bharatiya Bhavan – was expected to provide cheap accommodation for overseas Indians visiting India, while also housing a research institute 'to conduct research in the history, development and present conditions of Indian settlers abroad' and an 'international centre for the diffusion of Indian culture'.[152] The Bhavan would therefore stand as a 'monument to the abiding faith, perseverance and patriotism of the present Indian generation at home and abroad.'[153]

This organization had sent delegations to Africa and South East Asia in 1955 to interact with overseas Indian communities and collect funds for the construction of the Brihad Bharatiya Bhavan, some portion of which was to be funded by the Indian government. Given its high-profile leadership, British officials kept a watchful eye on its activities and held the organization as likely 'having the official backing of the Government of India' and acting as an 'unofficial intermediary' between the Indian government and its overseas communities.[154] While Patil and other members of his delegation were cautious to avoid controversial local topics and positioned themselves very much as 'a visiting VIP on a goodwill mission'[155], they stressed familiar themes: dispelling African notions of Indians as exploiters, urging the Indian community to be united politically while working towards a multiracial society, and emphasising India's goodwill for all coloured peoples. [156]

In public speeches, Patil nevertheless claimed that Africans had lacked 'anything in the way of civilization before the arrival of the Europeans and Indians … while in some areas they had made great advances, in others they were still very primitive.'[157] Even as Nehru warned Indians against imagining 'that everyone in Africa looks up to India with infinite gratitude as a kind of elder brother' the patronizing Indian gaze that viewed Africans as in grave need of India's advice and example to follow was widespread.[158] The

[151] Report on 'Organisation in India for Overseas Indians', dated July-August 1955, DO 35/5307, TNA
[152] Report on 'Organisation in India for Overseas Indians', dated July-August 1955, DO 35/5307, TNA
[153] Report on 'Organisation in India for Overseas Indians', dated July-August 1955, DO 35/5307, TNA
[154] Report on 'Organisation in India for Overseas Indians', dated July-August 1955, DO 35/5307, TNA
[155] Telegram from the Acting Governor of Uganda to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 16.6.55, DO 35/5307, TNA
[156] Letter from D. J King to R. C. Ormerod, 3.10.55, DO 35/5307, TNA
[157] Letter from D. J King to R. C. Ormerod, 3.10.55, DO 35/5307, TNA
[158] Speech by Nehru at the opening of the Department of African Studies, University of Delhi, 6.8.55, *SWJN,* Second Series, Vol 29, (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 2001)

Government of India's perception of Indian communities in African colonies ranged from notions of 'poor' former indentured labourers in need of Indian diplomatic assistance, to the perception of merchants and traders as exploitative agents who needed to be warned. Indeed, the latter often received strict censure to the extent that Nehru would even assert that 'we want them to remain there (in African countries) only so long as they have the goodwill of the people of the country … if they cannot retain that goodwill … the sooner they come back the better.'[159] Indian officials had long viewed these overseas communities as deficient in many ways. As Sutton has shown, 'these populations were deemed sufficiently Indian to justify the guidance of the Ministry and missions. They were simultaneously insufficiently Indian … both as actors within this broader political struggle and, therefore, as Indians.'[160]

By the mid 1950s, India's interest in Africa and pronouncements of Afro-Asian solidarity at the 1955 Bandung conference were increasingly complicated by rising anti-Indian sentiment in African colonies. Indeed, Antoinette Burton has advanced a thoughtful reading of Bandung that recognizes it 'less as an emancipatory lesson than as a cautionary tale about the racial logics embedded in postcolonial states from the moment of their inception.'[161] This was exemplified in the disillusionment of African students residing in India at much the same time, as part of a scholarship scheme aimed at creating solidarity. The scheme, as S. K. Patil confided to British officials during his African tour, had been a failure: 'some of the Africans on their return to the colonies have become amongst the bitterest enemies of the Indian settled in Africa.'[162] The response of Getonga Ngatia, an African student based in Delhi, to Patil's speeches urging African-Indian unity, is telling:

> Mr Patil is wrong in stating that Indians in East Africa are 'Africans first and Indians next.' I wonder if any true African will accept it. This is the same as saying that the Europeans who were in India were Indians first and Europeans next.[163]

British officials viewed the presence of Africans in India as a much-needed reality check

[159] Speech by Nehru, 6.8.55, *SWJN,* Second Series, Vol 29

[160] Sutton, 'Imagined Sovereignties,' 413

[161] Burton, *Africa in the Indian Imagination,* 6. A few notable examples of the vast scholarship on Bandung and its afterlives include Christopher J. Lee, ed. *Making a World after Empire: the Bandung moment and its Political afterlives* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2010) and Quỳnh N. Phạm and Robbie Shilliam, eds. *Meanings of Bandung: Postcolonial orders and Decolonial visions.* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016)

[162] Letter from D. J. King to R. C. Ormerod, 29.9.55, DO 35/5307, TNA

[163] Letter from Getonga Ngatia, 'Readers' View: Indians in East Africa, 26 July 1955, *Times of India*

for Indian exceptionalism and anti-colonial diplomacy. As G. H. Middleton, acting High Commissioner in New Delhi, gleefully reported, 'it is salutary for the Indians to discover that the former (Africans) have a legitimate pride in the achievements of their own territories and are by no means willing to accept without question Indian ideas about the way their affairs should be managed.'[164] While Indians sent aide memoires seeking clarification about British policy in African colonies, especially in the case of violent police action to suppress the Mau Mau rebellion, this was tempered by the disclaimer that India – though 'critically opposed' to colonialism – did not seek to 'make things difficult' for the British. Neither did they harbour any expansionist agendas in the region, as Menon repeatedly sought to assure British officials.[165] The question of anti-Indian immigration restrictions in African colonies, an issue constantly raised in Indian representations, had by then been framed as a nationalistic African response to prevent Indian hegemony. Indeed as Lord Reading, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, argued:

> It is ridiculous for Krishna Menon to talk as if the Africans were pining for the arrival of more Indians, that we were the only obstacles to the holding of a perpetual love fest between them. The row about the position of Indians in Africa is as old as my father's Viceroyalty.[166]

Regardless of their belief in the actual capability of the Indians to achieve hegemonic goals, this was a narrative that found much resonance with the Colonial Office's longstanding desire to limit India's presence in these regions and to resist Indian diplomatic actions against colonialism in international fora like the Trusteeship Council. Henry Hopkinson of the Colonial Office argued that Indian immigration was not only a 'menace to the economic interest of Africans but also … a potential weapon in the cause of Indian penetration of Africa and substitution of Indian for British influence in the colonies.'[167] The Colonial Office perceived a deliberate Indian policy to utilize the strength of the growing Indian populations in colonial regions in order to extend dominance over 'all coloured peoples', while paying 'lip service' by asking Indians to integrate. These Indian communities had long been viewed as especially problematic – resisting integration while wielding both an economic monopoly over colonies and a

[164] Letter from G. H. Middleton to H. F. C. Crookshank, 12.9.55, DO 133/147, TNA
[165] Letter from Henry Hopkinson to the Viscount Swinton, 27.1.54, FO 371/112214, 'Indian government policy towards British colonialism', TNA.
[166] Handwritten note from Lord Reading, 28.1.54, FO 371/112214, TNA
[167] Henry Hopkinson to Lord Swinton, 18.2.54, FO 371/112214, TNA

demographic dominance, given their significant populations and high fertility rate.[168] Fear of India's vast populations and the notion that India sought to get rid of excess populations through immigration would continue to resonate in the context of Indian immigrants in Britain, as we shall see in Chapter 5.

These varying degrees of paranoia about India's diplomatic role came to the fore in complaints against Apa Pant, Indian Commissioner in East Africa, who was transferred in 1954 after allegations of intervening in local politics.[169] Indian Foreign Secretary M. J. Desai later attempted to clarify Pant's record, arguing that he had not intended to interfere and had 'spent half his time resisting the pressures of one sort or another.' In his reading, this was an unfortunate outcome of the delicate diplomatic balance India had to maintain in the colonies:

> The position of any Indian Commissioner was a very difficult one in the present circumstances. The Indian community thought that they had only to go to the Commissioner for him to work things in their favour; and the Africans thought that India, now being free, should teach them how to be free also.[170]

Such a narrative also positioned India's diplomatic expertise as very much in demand among both indentured Indian and African communities, who apparently sought to achieve political consciousness by following India's stellar example.

CONCLUSION

We have seen how India's attempts to represent overseas Indian communities – navigating strict delineations of its claim over these Indians – provides a unique lens into the messy entanglements of nationality, citizenship, and the practice of postcolonial diplomacy. This is no more clearly illustrated than by overseas Indians' vexed experiences of repatriation. This was a history that ranged from South Africa's fixation with reducing its Indian population through compulsory repatriation in 1927, to countries such as Ceylon and Burma, where calls for repatriation were regarded as a solution to the crises

---

[168] Revised draft of joint memo by Secretary of State for Colonies and CRO (undated), FO 371/112214, TNA.

[169] For more on Pant's stint in East Africa see Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya* and Gerard McCann, 'From diaspora to third worldism and the United Nations: India and the politics of decolonizing Africa,' *Past & Present*, 218, no. supplement 8 (2013): 258-280.

[170] Quoted by A. Clutterbuck in his note about his conversation with M. J. Desai, 29 March 1954, FO 371

of citizenship faced by Indians in the 1940s.[171] The story of repatriation in British colonial territories such as British Guiana was, however, quite different.

In 1955, the M. V. Resurgent sailed from British Guiana, the last official ship chartered to carry 'home' former indentured labourers in fulfillment of a right of return stipulated in their contracts. This was no ordinary event since this was, after all, the last ship chartered by the British government in Guiana to transport former indentured labourers back to India: passengers wept as they began their voyage 'back home.'[172] These passengers – many of them elderly – had decided to travel 'back' to India despite repeated warnings from the Indian Commissioner in Trinidad and other officials of the British Guiana government that conditions in India were not suitable, particularly if they did not have financial resources for maintenance. While the Indian government had long resisted schemes of 'voluntary repatriation' owing to the fear that this would open the floodgates for forced repatriation of Indian populations resident across the world,[173] it is worth examining the vocabularies they used to distance themselves from these former indentured labourers. Arguing that India was under considerable strain managing Partition refugees, they noted that 'this would merely add to a problem … (that) the government of India are finding extremely difficult to solve.'[174] In a remarkable aide memoire on the subject, the Government of India expressed its grave concern about the programme of 'mass repatriation' and argued that past experience had shown that most repatriates were psychologically, physically, and financially unsuited to life in India. As they pointed out:

> The majority of repatriates are … so poor that they have no means to make a fresh start in life … (being) of an advanced age …. (they are) too infirm to take up any job or vocation … Having remained out of the country for many decades these repatriates find themselves without any roots or real contact with their

[171] See Uma S. Dhupelia-Mesthrie, 'Reducing the Indian Population to a "Manageable Compass": A Study of the South African Assisted Emigration Scheme of 1927,' *Natalia*, 15 (1985), 36–56 and Renaud Egreteau, 'India's Vanishing "Burma Colonies". Repatriation, Urban Citizenship, and(De)Mobilization of Indian Returnees from Burma (Myanmar) since the 1960s,' *Moussons. Recherche en sciences humaines sur l'Asie du Sud-Est,* 22 (2013): 11-34.

[172] Bahadur, *Coolie Woman*, 166

[173] Vineet Thakur, 'An Asian Drama: The Asian Relations Conference, 1947,' *International History Review*, (2018) DOI: 10.1080/07075332.2018.1434809

[174] Copy of Press Release, Trinidad, (undated), DO 35/5320, 'Repatriation of Indians from the British West Indies', TNA

relations in India.[175]

Calling on British officials to recognize the 'human' rather than legal aspect of the problem and offer an alternate enticement of land in lieu of repatriation rights, the Indian aide memoire stressed the moral responsibility of the government of British Guiana to help them 'settle down in the country permanently and to contribute further to its development'.[176] As British officials retorted, there was no 'mass' scheme of repatriation and there had been less than 300 repatriates on the MV Resurgent.[177] Fuming at a note that was 'wrong in its facts, more wrong in its deductions, and most wrong of all in the language in which it is couched', E. L. Sykes of the Commonwealth Relations Office expanded on the ironies of the document:

> One can easily imagine the virtuous indignation with which the Indians would regard a decision by the UK or some colonial government to dishonor the obligation to repatriate Indians who are entitled to such repatriation. It is equally easy to imagine their indignation if UK or colonial authorities tried to impress on Indians in the colonial empire how beastly conditions are in India today. Nevertheless these last two actions are the very things which the Indians imply we ought to be doing.[178]

Indeed, British officials noted the 'pleasing logic' of the fact that 'the desire to return to India is no doubt due, in part at least, to the propaganda put about in recent years by the Indian Commission'.[179] Stranded in Calcutta port and struggling to settle back in their 'homeland', many of these repatriates sought to return to British Guiana, reaching out to the British High Commission in India in this regard. Chastened British diplomats railed against the 'embarrassment' of dealing with these repatriates, especially given the fact that most of them were registered as Citizens of the UKC and held British passports.

The story of Mr Balgobin, lodged in the files of the MV Resurgent, perfectly exemplifies these dilemmas. A citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies (UKC) by birth, Balgobin sailed on the MV Resurgent not as a 'repatriate' per se but in order to 'see India' for the first time in his life. Traveling therefore at his own expense, Balgobin set

[175] Aide memoire from Ministry of External Affairs India, 27.8.55, DO 35/5320, TNA
[176] Aide memoire from Ministry of External Affairs India, 27.8.55, DO 35/5320, TNA
[177] Draft Savingram from London to British Guiana, 22 .9.55, DO 35/5320, TNA
[178] Letter from E. L. Sykes to J. V. Rob, 4.5.56, DO 35/5320, TNA
[179] Savingram dated 22.9.1955, DO 35/5320, TNA

his sights on Uttar Pradesh to meet his father's relatives and stay in India for a while before proceeding to the United Kingdom. Soon, however, Balgobin approached UK High Commission officials in India in desperation: he could not locate his relatives and had lost most of the money he was carrying. He had written to his family in British Guiana but had not heard from them and called on the High Commission to make contact. As the High Commission official noted in a letter to the CRO, 'I understand that he has now started pestering people, both British and Indian, for money to maintain himself and to go towards the cost of a passage to British Guiana, or, preferably, the United Kingdom. He has tried, unsuccessfully, to sign on a ship going to the UK.'[180] Given that the British Guiana government for the most part rejected such requests for assisted passages, Mr Balgobin's prospects were hardly auspicious. Carrying UKC passports while seeking to travel to India under a repatriation scheme sponsored by the British Guiana government, these 'Indians' embodied the unfortunate entanglements of citizenship, nationality and identity. Their journey was in many ways an ominous precursor to the crises of citizenship awaiting Kenyan and Ugandan Asians in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Indeed Nehru's response to the arrival of the MV Resurgent is telling: *'Thetar log agaye'* ('The stubborn people have come').[181]

In tracing the complex history of Indian diplomacy and its engagement with overseas Indians well after 1947, I have questioned much of the existing scholarship by highlighting the advent of an Indian diplomatic posture imbued with the histories of indenture. The afterlives of indenture shaped both the vocabularies and geographies of Indian diplomatic representation and international status, facilitating a distinct realm of British colonial territories across Africa and the Caribbean where India could assert its unique diplomatic stature. This was so even as British officials sought to limit India's unique diplomatic status, derived from the presence of significant numbers of Indian populations in these regions, through an unprecedented list of instructions for Indian Commissioners. Viewing this colonial terrain and its people as in grave need of Indian expertise about achieving postcolonial status and political consciousness, Indian diplomacy navigated these limits set by British officials – exemplifying the realities of performing postcolonial diplomacy. Yet, as the stories of entangled citizens like Balgobin indicate, India's efforts to project diplomatic influence by drawing on the presence and status of overseas Indians brought with it many a painful consequence.

---

[180] Letter from UKHC, New Delhi, 14.11.55, DO 35/5320, TNA

[181] Nalini Mohabir and Hyacinth Simpson. 'Resurgent (Rise Again): The Last Repatriation of Indo-Caribbean Indentured Labourers,' *Interventions*, 8, no. 3 (2006), 505.

4

THE PRIVILEGE OF THE INDIAN PASSPORT (1947-1967)

CASTE AND CLASS IN THE INTERNATIONAL REALM

> The passport is a political document and one which the State may choose to give or withhold. Since a passport vouches for the respectability of the holder, it stands to reason that the Government need not vouch for a person it does not consider worth.[1]

In 1967, a five-judge bench of the Supreme Court of India held in a landmark judgement that the right to hold a passport and travel abroad was a fundamental right of every Indian. They noted, in a narrow 3:2 ruling, that by granting passports as per its discretion until then, the executive had 'patently violate(d) the doctrine of equality' of the Indian constitution. Yet as the remarks quoted above from the dissenting statement of two judges show, a passport was also considered a document of privilege that would offer its holder the recognition of the state – it could therefore only be offered to those deemed 'respectable' or 'worthy' enough to represent India and uphold its honour abroad.[2]

This chapter explores the discretionary grant of Indian passports from 1947 to 1967 as a system through which the Indian state produced the ideal Indian citizen and migrant capable of representing India in the sanctified 'international' realm. This was a process imbued with the intersections of caste and class and shaped by the afterlives of indenture. The widespread narrative that India's international reputation had been besmirched by the shame of the 'coolie' – a category of colonial Indian migrants widely regarded as belonging to the lowest class and caste backgrounds – pervaded endless assertions that 'unskilled', 'undesirable', 'pedlar class' Indians would similarly embarrass the postcolonial Indian nation abroad. This strict control over the grant of passports was an effort undertaken in collaboration with British officials who were keen on restricting the influx of Indian migrants into Britain – their entangled status as British subjects as per the British Nationality Act of 1948 enabling them to enter Britain freely. This was

[1] Dissenting arguments of Judges M. Hidayatullah and R. S. Bachawat. Satwant Singh Sawhney vs D. Ramarathnam, assistant Passport Officer, Government of India, 1967 AIR 1836. Available at https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1747577/

[2] Dissenting arguments of Judges M. Hidayatullah and R. S. Bachawat. Satwant Singh Sawhney vs D. Ramarathnam, assistant Passport Officer, Government of India, 1967 AIR 1836.

therefore an exercise in marking out a mutually-overlapping set of 'undesirables.' For the Indian authorities, this meant preventing the mobility of 'unsuitable' lower caste and class individuals – seemingly the legatees of the 'coolie', who were most likely to embarrass India in the West. For British officials, this was defined by grave concerns about increasing numbers of 'coloured immigrants' of 'Indian race' in general, and by the lowliest 'pedlar class' of Indians in particular. Indeed British anxieties were further compounded by the fact that large numbers of Indians also held United Kingdom and Colonies (UKC) or colonial passports and could migrate freely as British subjects. The oppressive control over the grant of Indian passports led to a proliferation of forged passports utilised to bypass the restrictions placed by the state, a crisis that both British and Indian officials viewed as proof of their notions of the lower class/caste migrant as an innately suspicious and shameful representative of Indianness.

Mahmood Mamdani has thoughtfully argued that 'a passport is essentially a class document.'[3] I will show that the Indian passport was essentially a document embodying the intersections of caste and class. In so doing, I articulate a reading of the passport that is significantly different from the existing literature on the postcolonial Indian passport which largely focuses on its use in the context of Partition. By recovering the salience of caste in shaping Indian ideas of the international realm and those that were deemed eligible to traverse it, I seek to add to the nascent literature investigating the ways in which Indian diplomacy and international relations were imbued by the euphemisms and vocabularies of caste. In so doing, I also go beyond analyses that view the Indian state's relationship with its migrants solely in terms of its relationship with its established 'diaspora'.[4] Instead, I investigate India's diplomatic mediation of the very process of migration and its discretionary grant of passports as a discourse where the Indian government perceived every passport issued as an act of inscribing national identity onto an international stage – a notion that had grave consequences for thousands of Indians deemed 'unsuitable.' The afterlives of indenture inform the postcolonial negotiation of identities and discourses shaped by Empire, an aspect further reinforced by the limits and prospects of migration enabled by the BNA.

---

[3] Mahmood Mamdani, *From Citizen to Refugee: Uganda Asians come to Britain* (Cape Town: Fahamu/Pambazuka, 2011), 29

[4] Notable examples include Itty Abraham, *How India Became Territorial: Foreign Policy, Diaspora, Geopolitics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014) and Latha Varadarajan, *The Domestic Abroad: Diasporas in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

PASSPORT HISTORIES

Much has been written about the role of the passport in identifying an individual as belonging to a nation-state and in so doing, providing the documentary basis for the state's successful 'monopolization of the legitimate means of movement.'[5] As an identity document, the passport both translates the identity of an individual onto paper and acts as a 'state artefact' of citizenship.[6] As a document ostensibly meant *for* travel, it nevertheless reflects the sovereign control over mobility that marks out certain travellers as 'undesirable' and their movement to certain areas as illegitimate or 'illegal'. In so doing, the passport intertwines national identity with the capacity for international travel; after all, it 'connects the individual to the realm of the international.'[7] It is this very potential of the passport-holder to represent his or her nation in the international realm that shaped the Indian state's discretionary grant of passports only to those deemed worthy of upholding the honour of the nation-state.

The Indian passport system was a necessarily exclusionary process shaped by the afterlives of indenture and imbued with meanings of caste and class: indeed with financial guarantees and even educational qualifications deemed necessary in order to obtain a passport, the system was in many ways akin to visa regimes that permit the entry of only 'highly skilled' migrants. While scholars have shed light on the restrictions encountered by Indians migrants in countries such as the United States and Canada, the entangled status of Indians as British subjects as per the BNA created a unique scenario where strict restrictions were imposed by the Indian government itself, in coordination with British officials.[8]

It is more useful therefore to read the history of the passport not as a document 'protecting' citizens and facilitating mobility, but as one standardizing the restriction and

[5] John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 7. See also Mark B. Salter, *Rights of Passage: The Passport in International Relations* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003)

[6] Kamal Sadiq, 'Limits of Legal Citizenship: Narratives from South and Southeast Asia' in *Citizenship in Question: Evidentiary Birthright and Statelessness,* eds, Benjamin N. Lawrance and Jacqueline Stevens (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017)

[7] Salter, *Rights of Passage*, 1

[8] Excellent, diverse examples include Vivek Bald, *Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), Hugh Johnston, *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru: The Sikh Challenge to Canada's Colour Bar* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979), Renisa Mawani, *Across Oceans of Law: The Komagata Maru and Jurisdiction in the Time of Empire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018)

regulation of the migration of 'undesirables'. Indeed in a fascinating intervention excavating the passport as a product of Empire, Radhika Mongia has shown that attempts to regulate the migration of 'free' Indians into Canada – 'coloured' British subjects, but British subjects nevertheless – produced the passport as an ostensibly 'national' document concealing race.[9] This cemented the notion of a nation-state's 'inherent right' to control immigration on 'national' lines: an 'alibi' to deny charges of racial discrimination. Indeed, as Mongia points out, this 'monopoly over migration indicates not that control over mobility begins after the formation of the nation-state but that the very development of the nation-state occurs, in part, to control mobility along the axis of the nation-race.'[10] This went hand in hand with the Indian state's own restrictive guidelines as to who could be granted a passport – a process wherein, as Radhika Singha shows, the passport was constructed as a 'civic credential' meant 'only for Indians of 'means, education and standing.'[11] This was not a facility extended to either the 'non-regulated' labourers working in Malaya, Ceylon, and Burma, or the indentured 'coolies'.[12]

The Government of India's delineation of those who were eligible to obtain a passport thereby also shaped the international production of certain categories of Indians as somewhat more 'desirable': indeed, as early as 1904, the Indian government had reached an agreement with Australia that facilitated the entry of only '"bona fide" Indian merchants, students and tourists to enter and stay for up to a year', while not being subjected to its literacy test.[13] The granting of a passport was thus tied to the notion of the potential acceptability of its holder in the international realm. For those deemed eligible to hold a passport, this document bestowed upon them formal recognition of their subjecthood and relationship with the British Empire and the colonial state in India.[14] Until 1914, any passport issued in India (or the Dominions) 'was proof of British subjecthood within that territory.'[15] The British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act 1914, for the first time, allowed Indians to enter British colonies freely, even though their

[9] Radhika Viyas Mongia, 'Race, Nationality, Mobility: A History of the Passport,' *Public Culture*, 11, no. 3 (1999)

[10] Mongia, 'Race, Nationality, Mobility', 554.

[11] Radhika Singha, 'The Great War and a 'Proper' Passport for the Colony: Border-Crossing in British India, c.1882–1922,' *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 50, no. 3 (2013): 313.

[12] Singha, 'The Great War and a 'Proper' Passport,' 293.

[13] Singha, 'The Great War and a 'Proper' Passport', 295.

[14] Niraja Gopal Jayal, *Citizenship and its Discontents: An Indian History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 28-29.

[15] Jayal, *Citizenship and its Discontents,* 32.

entry to the Dominions was restricted since the Dominions were now empowered to enact immigration policies. The introduction of the compulsory passport regime in India in 1917 – as a wartime measure during the first World War – thus both asserted the coherence and significance of the Indian empire and also created a state document camouflaging race into a 'national attribute' that could be justifiably used to deny the movement of Indians into white Dominions like Canada without bringing into question the putative equality of all British subjects within the Empire.[16]

Histories of the Indian passport after 1947 have largely focussed only on the India-Pakistan passport system through which the new postcolonial states controlled and authorized mobility. [17] There is little focus on the remarkable 20-year period of discretionary grant of Indian passports for those seeking to travel abroad, especially to the West, or the fact that until 1954, state governments were in charge of issuing passports. This was a process whereby Indian and British officials together constructed a category of Indians mutually regarded as 'undesirable' for entry into Britain, a narrative produced by the intersections of race, caste and class in the long aftermath of Empire.

A significant literature focusing on immigration and border control has traced the persistent construction of 'desirable' and 'undesirable immigrants' – terms laden with meanings of dirt, pollution and fear of miscegenation. As Tamara Vukov has argued, the narrative of the 'desirable immigrant' is delineated in relation to their ability to 'constitute the imagined community' of the nation. This in turn necessitated 'simultaneously repelling undesirable immigrants' in order to 'produce and regulate the population while securing the state and its national borders against a whole range of "undesirable"

[16] Mongia 'Race, Nationality, Mobility', 529

[17] Fascinating examples of work focusing on the India-Pakistan passport system include Haimanti Roy, 'Paper Rights: The Emergence of Documentary Identities in Post-Colonial India, 1950–67,' *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 39, no. 2 (2016), Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007) and Jayal, *Citizenship and its Discontents*. Joya Chatterji makes a brief mention of the discretionary grant of passports. See Joya Chatterji, 'From Imperial Subjects to National Citizens: South Asians and the International Migration Regime since 1947,' in *Routledge Handbook of the South Asian diaspora,* eds, Joya Chatterji and David Washbrook (New York: Routledge, 2013), 193. Historical and sociological accounts of Indian immigration to Britain also discuss the passport system briefly. See Rashmi Desai, *Indian Immigrants in Britain*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), and Dilip Hiro, *Black British, White British* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1971). More recent examples include Ian R. G. Spencer, *British Immigration Policy since 1939: The Making of Multi-Racial Britain*. (New York: Routledge, 1997) and Clair Wills, *Lovers and Strangers: An Immigrant History of Post-war Britain*. (London: Penguin, 2017)

others.'[18] Imogen Tyler has viewed the status of undesirable migrants as 'national abjects' who seem to pollute the body politic, provoke disgust and revulsion, and yet by their presence paradoxically reinforce the authority and identity of the nation-state. She has powerfully argued that abjection is a 'design principle of British citizenship', serving as 'a technology to abjectify undesirable migrants from the former colonies', who are positioned as 'interiorized others.'[19] As the horrific practice of 'virginity testing' of South Asian women entering Britain in the 1970s exemplifies, the border of British immigration was a site where the bodies of migrants were subject to rigorous scrutiny and permitted to pass through only if they could prove their worthiness, value and desirability for the British nation-state. In this reading, the border serves as a 'filter', a much-needed barrier that 'distinguishes between the desired and the undesired.' [20]

While these interventions no doubt offer a useful lens to understand the production of migrants as 'undesirables', a focus on the intersections of race, caste, and class permeating discourses about indenture are essential to understanding the particular meanings of the term in the Indian context. The presence of Indians in British colonial territories and Dominions spurred important if inconvenient narratives of Indian identity that derived from frameworks of caste, class and race. The history of Indian indentured labour is central to such debates: not just in terms of the stereotype of the dreaded lower caste/class coolie that informed such notions, but very much the fact that the 'coolie' narrative became the overarching discourse against which other notions challenging this construction of overseas Indian identity were articulated. Indeed, as Marina Carter and Khal Torabully have pointed out, 'indenture was decried as the cause of a rise in anti-Indian discrimination throughout the Empire.'[21] As we have seen in the previous chapter, even when Indian nationalist leaders campaigned to put an end to indenture, their motivation was very much the fact that 'all of their compatriots would be tarred with the 'coolie' brush.' [22]

---

[18] Tamara Vukov, 'Imagining communities through immigration policies: Governmental regulation, media spectacles and the affective politics of national border,' *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 6, no. 3 (2003): 335-353.

[19] Imogen Tyler, *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain* (London: Zed Books, 2013), 73

[20] Evan Smith and Marinella Marmo, *Race, Gender and the Body in British Immigration Control: Subject to Examination* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 11.

[21] Marina Carter and Khal Torabully, *Coolitude*, (London: Anthem Press, 2002), 61.

[22] Carter and Torabully, *Coolitude*, 61

The 'free' 'passenger Indians' in regions of indentured labour emigration were especially keen to dissociate themselves from these 'coolies'. As is well known, Mohandas Gandhi had written to the British High Commissioner in Natal in 1905 calling for an end to the usage of the 'offensive' term 'coolie' in the context of Indian traders – indeed he had long bristled at being called a 'coolie lawyer.'[23] Sorabji M Darookhanawala, an Indian engineer from Zanzibar, was speaking for many such elite Indians when he argued that the 'unclean…dirty' coolies were 'entirely to blame because of their lack of manners' for provoking the dislike and disgust of the English. Thus, even as such elite Indians protested against being treated as 'undesirables and niggers to be boycotted and got rid of', they themselves delineated a certain kind of Indian as more worthy of respect and fair treatment than others.[24]

Such narratives of the civilizational superiority of a particular type of Indian were further complicated by the dynamics of race, wherein the African native was regarded as inferior even to the Indian coolie.[25] This construction of what W. E. B. Du Bois fittingly termed 'a color line within a color line' shaped Indian self-perceptions of their racial identity, particularly in the case of overseas Indian communities.[26] These discourses relied on upper caste and class elites as the upholders of Indian civilizational glories – a narrative that carried with it expansionist histories of British India as a 'sub-imperial' power with its own sphere of influence, an 'empire of the Raj'.[27] This was further amplified by notions, even among the British, that a 'better class' of Indians were in stark contrast to the coolie and could act as 'settlers' or 'colonizers' and participate in the 'civilising mission' in African colonies.[28]

While it has become increasingly commonplace for scholars to point to the ways in which the supposed inherent genius of Indian civilization has shaped discourses of Indian exceptionalism, postcolonial identity and foreign policy, it is equally important to

---

[23] Carter and Torabully, *Coolitude,* 118

[24] Sana Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya: The Politics of Diaspora*, (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2015), 59 and 69

[25] Sankaran Krishna, 'A Postcolonial Racial/Spatial Order: Gandhi, Ambedkar and the Construction of the International' in *Race and Racism in International Relations*, eds, Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda and Robbie Shilliam (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 147

[26] W. E. B. Du Bois, *Dark Princess* (Minnesota: University of Mississippi Press, 1976), 22

[27] Both Krishna and Aiyar make this argument. See Krishna, 'A Postcolonial Racial/Spatial Order', 147 and Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya*, 59

[28] See Robert J. Blyth, *The Empire of the Raj: India, Eastern Africa, and the Middle East, 1858-1947*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003)

reiterate that the rhetoric of civilization functioned in vividly racial terms.[29] Indeed upper caste Indians in America identified themselves as Aryans in an attempt to circumvent the prevalent construction of the menacing, undesirable 'Hindoo' race and articulate their claim to citizenship.[30] This was a reiteration of the 'two-race theory' of Indian civilization, propounded especially by Max Müller, which produced binary categories of upper caste Aryan Indians as Caucasians and lower caste/Dravidian Indians as 'Negroes'.[31] This shaped perceptions of the hierarchies of being 'coloured', wherein elite Indians attempted to distance themselves as much from the infamy of the lower caste/class 'coolie' as from the status of black Americans and Africans.

Writing in 1933, Lanka Sundaram, Director of the Indian Institute for International Affairs, argued that the betterment of overseas Indians was dependent not just on a 'truly national' Indian government that could better represent their sentiments and concerns, but also on the ability of new generations of 'colonial-born' Indians to move away from the reputation of indentured labourers 'drawn from the lowest strata of the Indian social fabric and as such do not represent all that is fair and noble in our civilization.'[32] The discrimination faced by these 'better' category of Indians, regarded as far more ideal representatives of India in the international system, was attributed to both India's dependent status within the Empire and the ignominy brought about by association with the indentured labourer. In the words of the academic and demographer S. Chandrasekhar, it was 'irrational to maintain that because the original Indian immigrants were of a laboring class, and hence of a low standard of living, no emigration of the people of a higher standard can be permitted today.'[33] This 'standard of living' argument utilized by British officials also irked the scholar P. Kodanda Rao, who decried the fact that the reputation of the dreaded coolie had resulted in 'a racial solution … being applied to an economic problem.'[34] Railing against the assumption of British and

[29] See Priya Chacko, *Indian Foreign Policy: The Politics of Postcolonial Identity from 1947 to 2004* (London: Routledge, 2012). Aiyar also discusses the ways in which the discourse of Indians in East Africa conflated civilization with race. See Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya,* 22-69.

[30] Hemant Shah, 'Race, Nation, and Citizenship: Asian Indians and the Idea of Whiteness in the U.S. Press, 1906-1923,' *Howard Journal of Communication*, 10, no. 4 (1999), 262

[31] Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India.* (Cambridge, MA. : Harvard University Press, 2011), 10-11.

[32] Lanka Sundaram, *Indians Overseas: A study in Economic-Sociology*, (Madras: G. A Natesan and Co., 1933), 174

[33] S. Chandrasekhar, 'The Emigration and Status of Indians in the British Empire,' *Social Forces*, 24, No. 2, (1945), 152

[34] P. Kodanda Rao, 'Indians Overseas,' *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 233, no. 1 (1944): 206

Dominion officials that all Indians were of low economic, social and cultural status, he noted that there was 'no economic justification for excluding an Indian Maharaja, even as there was none for refusing H. H. The Aga Khan a piece of land in the Kenya highlands because he was an Indian.'[35] While these discourses clearly indicate the ways in which elite Indians sought to distance themselves from the histories and legacies of the coolie, how does one read this as a narrative of caste?

Scholars of indentured labour migration have challenged widespread stereotypes of the 'coolie' as a passive, gullible, immoral actor bereft of any agency. In so doing, they have also stressed the diverse social and caste backgrounds of these labourers, confronting the notion of indentured labourers as exemplifying the lowest rungs of Indian society.[36] Caste has thus been an important part of the debate on indenture – both in terms of the possibilities it presented for seemingly transcending and losing caste by going across the seas, and in terms of its strange persistence nevertheless in indentured communities.[37] Responding to Antoinette Burton's call for readings of caste and its dynamic vis-à-vis race that go beyond a helpful yet largely US-centric focus, I show that the histories and afterlives of indenture in Indian diplomatic discourse offer a valuable space to recover the intersections of caste, class and race.[38]

That 'caste' is not spoken by name does not negate it from histories of Indian identity and diplomatic history. The relegation of caste to the 'social' realm has a longstanding history evident in the formation of two distinct bodies before independence: the National Congress for 'political reform' and the Social Conference for 'social reform'. The agenda of the Social Conference took a backseat as elite Congress Hindus argued that political reform to liberate the Indian nation from British rule could not wait until

---

[35] Rao, 'Indians Overseas,' 207

[36] This is a wide-ranging scholarship. Some notable examples include Brij V. Lal, 'Understanding the Indian indenture experience,' *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 21, no. s1 (1998): 215-237, Gaiutra Bahadur, *Coolie Woman: The odyssey of indenture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), Crispin Bates, 'Some Thoughts on the Representation and Misrepresentation of the Colonial South Asian Labour Diaspora,' *South Asian Studies*, 33, no. 1, (2017), 7-22, Ashutosh Kumar*, Coolies of the Empire: Indentured Indians in the Sugar Colonies, 1830-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017)

[37] See John Solomon, *A Subaltern History of the Indian Diaspora in Singapore: The Gradual Disappearance of Untouchability 1872-1965*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2016) and Clare Anderson, 'Convicts and coolies: rethinking indentured labour in the nineteenth century.' *Slavery and Abolition,* 30, no. 1 (2009): 93-109.

[38] Antoinette Burton, *Africa in the Indian Imagination: Race and the politics of postcolonial citation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 6. See Nico Slate, 'Translating race and caste,' *Journal of Historical Sociology* 24, no. 1 (2011): 62-79 and Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*. Also see Daniel Immerwahr, 'Caste or colony? Indianizing race in the United States,' *Modern Intellectual History* 4, no. 2 (2007): 275-301

social reform was achieved.[39] These debates had significant manifestations that continue to define the silences over caste in discourses of Indian foreign policy. Caste was placed in contrast to the struggle for independence, thereby defined as a problematic that questioned the capacity of India to be 'fit' for self-rule.[40] These narratives resulted in grouping together the political and the international, and the social and the domestic: a categorization that reiterated the problem of caste as outside the purview of international relations and foreign policy. Indeed, this conscious attempt to circumscribe caste as a uniquely domestic, Hindu issue within the sovereign borders of the postcolonial nation-state ensured that there would be no 'global opprobrium or attention associated with slavery or apartheid.'[41] Moreover, the Nehruvian developmentalist state's vision of the nation as 'an inclusive space of casteless and secular citizens' rendered caste invisible in its discourse.[42] Indeed, the apparent absence of the word caste itself should be viewed as striking; as Mongia has argued in the case of race, 'the "guilt" of racism is evident … in the general policy of not naming race.'.[43]

These narratives permeate the elite Indian conception of the 'international': not so much as a distant, casteless realm, but more so as a sanctified space in which the honour of the nation-state was at stake. If anything, the notion of a casteless international terrain, wherein the privilege of being casteless was one held only by upper caste Indians, was facilitated by attempts to exclude lower caste and class citizens from gaining passports and thereby entering the international realm in the first place. Indeed, the almost normative recognition of the upper caste/class Indian as the ideal citizen and passport-holder is unsurprising. As M. S. S. Pandian has shown, not only did the colonial experience produce the Brahmin as both the authentic representative of Hinduism and the true Indian most capable of achieving modernity, the transition to the postcolonial era reiterated 'the Brahminic as the national…a move which implicitly reduced non-Brahmins and religious minorities as being inadequately Indian.'[44] This produced vocabularies of privilege and humiliation that permeate discourses of Indian foreign policy and function as euphemisms of that often unnamed word: 'caste'. Yet centering

[39] See Krishna, 'A Postcolonial Racial/Spatial Order,' 147-150 and M. S. S. Pandian, *Brahmin and Non-Brahmin: Genealogies of the Tamil Political Present*, (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007)

[40] Gopal Guru, 'The Indian Nation in its Egalitarian Conception,' in *Dalit Studies*, eds, Ramnarayan S. Rawat and K. Satyanarayana (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 39

[41] Krishna, 'A Postcolonial Racial/Spatial Order,' 155

[42] Ramnarayan S. Rawat and K. Satyanarayana, 'Introduction' in *Dalit Studies*, eds, Ramnarayan S. Rawat and K. Satyanarayana (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), 13

[43] Mongia, 'Race, Nationality, Mobility,' 546

[44] Pandian, *Brahmin and Non-Brahmin*, 35

the experience of indenture makes the salience of caste all the more visible: a fact most evident in the earliest elite narratives about the 'coolie'. Gandhi's interpretation of the word 'coolie', as I have shown in the introduction, relied on more familiar meanings of caste – effectively a 'transcoding' of caste, class and race, to borrow Sankaran Krishna's phrase.[45] As Gandhi put it:

> We have become the untouchables of south Africa … The word coolie … means what a pariah or untouchable means to us[46]

It is worth interrogating the 'we' and 'us' in this statement: Gandhi's reading of the term 'coolie' did not simply mean that the 'coolies' were the untouchables of South Africa, but that all Indians including elite Indians like Gandhi himself were, by extension, enveloped in this untouchable status. Indeed, Gandhi wrote that this was 'retribution' for the fact that Hindus had excluded a 'section of their own kith and kin' as untouchables.[47] In these recollections of his work as a lawyer representing the indentured labourers of South Africa, Gandhi's articulations of solidarity are nevertheless tempered by a clear indication of his difference from them. As he wrote, Indians in South Africa had 'not insulted me by calling or regarding me as "sahib" (master/sir) … others … continued to address me as "bhai" (brother) until the moment I left South Africa. There was a sweet flavour about the name when it was used by the ex-indentured Indians.'[48] Gandhi's kinship with indentured labourers was thus far more special and unique, given his clear dominant caste and class status. He had long articulated the 'humiliation' brought about due to the reverence shown by indentured labourers towards him. In his autobiography, Gandhi recalled his shock at the fact that an indentured labourer named Balasundaram had entered his office with his headgear in hand – the act of having removed the turban seen as reinforcing the inferiority of the person. In his account:

> Balasundaram thought that he should follow the practice even with me. This was the first case in my experience. I felt humiliated and asked him to tie up his scarf. He did so, not without a certain hesitation, but I could perceive the pleasure on his face.[49]

---

[45] Krishna, 'A Postcolonial Racial/Spatial Order,' 145

[46] Mohandas K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or the Story of my Experiments with Truth*, (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1926), 350

[47] Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, 350.

[48] Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, 353.

[49] Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, 192.

For Gandhi, this was not unlike the incident where he had himself been made to take off his turban by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in South Africa. Even where Gandhi drew attention to the seemingly similar circumstances that both Balasundaram and he faced, it served to reiterate the marked difference in the stature of one Indian being 'humiliated' in the Supreme Court and the other who viewed himself as far inferior to a 'fellow' Indian.[50]

Gandhi was far from the only one framing indenture through the rubrics of caste. Charles Freer Andrews and William Pearson's 1916 report on the conditions of indenture in Fiji is an archive of anxiety about lower caste, immoral coolies and what was in their view the inexplicable presence of upper caste individuals in these communities. For Andrews and Pearson, these indentured communities were comprised of individuals of the lowest caste and social status in Indian society – a problematic demographic profile further compounded by what they viewed as the tragedy of losing caste by traveling outside India. They held that such factors had created chaotic societies bound by few rules or morals. This was most problematic, in their view, since these communities had humiliated the 'fair name of India' in the international realm:

> Fiji is, at present, like a great flaring advertisement, saying, in big letters, to all who travel to and fro across the Pacific – 'This is India.' ... We found ourselves protesting every day of our journey to our fellow passengers – 'This is not India.' But the patent fact remained … It was the only 'India' which the travellers in the Pacific saw.[51]

Writing many decades after Gandhi and Andrews, Kodanda Rao reiterated a familiar analogy whereby 'Indians overseas are treated by the local whites as untouchables are treated in India or Negroes are treated in the United States', arguing that the increasing restrictions faced by Indian emigrants was due to 'India's dependent status, the colored racial character of her nationals, and the fact that the bulk of her emigrants have been unskilled coolies.'[52] Many other scholars of Indian emigration too were unanimous in

---

[50] Joseph Lelyveld has pointed to discrepancies in Gandhi's account of the Balasundaram incident. See Joseph Lelyveld, *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and his Struggle with India*, (New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 39-41.

[51] C. F. Andrews and W. W. Pearson, *Report on Indentured Labour in Fiji: An Independent Enquiry* (Calcutta: Star Printing Works, 1916), XVII.

[52] Rao, 'Indians Overseas,' 201

lamenting the steadily deteriorating status of the Indian abroad and what they viewed as the lasting stain of indenture – a discourse laden with meanings of caste and class, as we have seen. In Lanka Sundaram's view, the increasing discrimination faced by Indians across the world was clearly a legacy of the coolie:

> Even after the abolition of indenture, the psychological as well as the social environment, which held sway for nearly a century, persisted in continuing. Hence, today problems of Indian emigration in distant countries are not so much the products of current difficulties but the net result of accumulated prejudices and hatred of over ten decades. The indenture concept is still present in the "coolie-swamy" phraseology of colonial administrations.[53]

These afterlives of indenture shaped the discretionary grant of Indian passports and the exclusion of lower caste and class individuals – now euphemistically referred to as 'unskilled', 'undesirable', 'pedlar class' Indians and deemed as unpleasant reminders of the coolie, thereby humiliating for the nation-state. The claim to represent India in the international realm seemed far more 'natural' for upper caste and class Indians, given that other marginalized castes and communities had long been delegitimized as 'imperfect' Indians within the nation and as particularly shameful representatives of Indianness overseas. Indeed, the very articulation of the Indian nation had been 'imbued with Hindu Brahminical consciousness championed by Western educated caste Hindu elites.'[54] As we have seen, such elites had consistently sought to distance themselves from the reputation of the 'coolie' – a strikingly persistent term, as evident from the remarks of South African politician Oswald Pirow in 1953:

> Nehru is just another coolie … He knows the West, is a good speaker and a sharp debater, but immediately he opens his mouth it is all too clear he is only a coolie … [55]

Thus even while Nehru's elite upbringing and Western education could not, in Pirow's eyes, absolve him of 'coolie' status, such criterion were central to Indian notions of those who could represent India in the international stage. This is evident in the profile of most

[53] Sundaram, *Indians Overseas*, 170

[54] Chinnaiah Jangam, *Dalits and the Making of Modern India*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press. 2017), 11

[55] Goolam Vahed, "Nehru is just another coolie': India and South Africa at the United Nations, 1946-1955,' *Alternation*, Special Edition, no. 15 (2015), 55.

Indian diplomats, almost all of whom were Western-educated and drawn from the "'the upper middle class" or "well to do semi-feudal segments of ... Indian society", and came from wealthy families.'[56] Suraj Yengde has argued that this preponderance of the Brahminical class ensured the reiteration of the postcolonial Indian state as the successor of the British Raj by keeping 'the foreign policy stance the same by excluding the marginalized community from its deliberations' – thereby ensuring that 'the internal strife between the majority and minority communities remained muted on international platforms.' [57] Indeed elite upper-caste Indians had long positioned themselves as 'authoritative interlocutors between their societies and the white international system', and defined the 'lower-class/caste Indians and Africans as bringing up the rear of this hierarchy.'[58]

Such notions are evident in India's representative Sir B. N. Rau's apparent suggestion that a solution to South Africa's 'India problem' involved providing the full rights of citizenship to a 'small number of … the cultured and best type of Indians.'[59] According to a remarkable memorandum sent by G. P. Jooste, South Africa's representative to the UN, in which he detailed his informal meeting with Rau, the latter had noted that Indians who went to South Africa were not 'the best type' and had given India a 'bad name.' Vineet Thakur draws on Rau's reference to his discomfort with the growing anti-caste movement in India –seeing it, remarkably, as a form of discrimination against upper caste communities – to show that his 'euphemistic reference to Indians of the "best type" was really a proxy for the upper castes.' Indeed, as per Jooste, Rau had gone on to suggest that India did not mind the discrimination against undesirable, lower caste Indians who were not 'the best type', as long as 'it was not based on racial lines'.[60] As we shall see, India employed similar logics of interpretation in 1961 to assure British officials seeking to legislate the discriminatory Commonwealth Immigrants Act that restriction against undesirable lower caste/class migrants was permissible, even understandable, and did not amount per se to 'racial discrimination' as long as 'skilled' elite Indians were permitted to

[56] I examine the caste/class profile of Indian diplomats as a narration of Indian identity in Chapter 5. Kate Sullivan, 'Exceptionalism in Indian Diplomacy: The Origins of India's Moral Leadership Aspirations,' *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 37, no. 4, (2014), 647

[57] Suraj Yengde, 'Ambedkar's Foreign Policy and the Ellipsis of the 'Dalit' from International Activism,' in *The Radical in Ambedkar: Critical Reflection*s, eds, Suraj Yengde and Anand Teltumbde (New Delhi: Penguin, 2018), 105.

[58] Krishna, 'A Postcolonial Racial/Spatial Order,' 146-147

[59] Vineet Thakur, 'When India Proposed a Casteist Solution to South Africa's Racist Problem', *The Wire,* 4 April 2016 https://thewire.in/diplomacy/exploring-casteism-in-indias-foreign-policy

[60] Thakur,' When India Proposed a Casteist Solution.'

enter Britain.

Even though Rau's overt mention of caste may be unexpected, longstanding narratives over the shame of the 'coolie' make evident the inherently casteist meanings of such euphemisms. Moreover, Rau was no exception even in the blatant articulations of caste. Such narratives are also evident in the remarks of S. K. Patil, a leading Congress politician who headed the delegation of the Brihad Bharatiya Samaj to East Africa. As we have seen in the previous chapter, this was an organization that aimed to champion the cause of overseas Indians, and during his trip Patil had called for solidarity between Africans and Indians in public speeches. In private conversations with British officials however, Patil was far more frank in claiming that the 'Africans were still so backward as to be completely unfit for self-government.' Most importantly, the internal report circulated by British officials after their meeting with Patil quoted his views on segregation in East Africa:

> Speaking candidly there was some justification for the desire of the more advanced communities in East Africa to have a measure of social segregation from the more primitive peoples (he admitted to a similar antipathy on his own part towards eating with, living in close proximity with e.g the "adivasis.")[61]

This alarming intertwining of race and caste reiterates the ways in which Indian understandings of race, particularly regarding the place of Africans in the international realm, relied on more local meanings and perceptions of lower castes and tribes such as the Adivasis (literally translated as the 'indigenous inhabitants.') While Rau and Patil offer easier interpretive access to the researcher by 'obviously' stating the word caste or the term Adivasi, it is crucial to track the more subtle yet evident euphemisms of caste that permeate Indian diplomatic discourse – a task I have undertaken by utilising the overarching frame of indenture and its afterlives.

The intersections of caste, class and race were not just significant for Indian delineations of the lower caste/class migrant undeserving of a passport, but in its own ways also shaped British official views of certain categories of Indians as particularly 'undesirable'

[61] Letter from D. J King to R.C Ormerod, 3.10.55, DO 35/5307, 'Activities of Shri Brihad, Bharatiya Samaj (Indian Overseas League): tour by its leader, S K Patel to East Africa and Fiji', The National Archives at Kew (TNA hereafter).

members of the 'coolie class.'[62] Indeed, as Martin Wainwright has shown, British notions of the 'social rank' of Indians in the metropole were often shaped by the caste and class ranking of Indians in their own society – hence their widespread tendency to view Brahmans 'inherently as a respectable class.'[63] This was further complicated by the entangled status of all Indians as British subjects as per the BNA, many of whom held British subject or United Kingdom and Colonies passports. The unintended 'concealment' of their racial identity within the broader 'national' rubrics of these passports was an issue of particular concern for British officials, compounded by their inability to legally prevent the entry of British subjects into the United Kingdom.[64]

IDENTIFYING 'INDIAN RACE' IN BRITISH PASSPORTS

A significant scholarship has shown the ways in which the colonial British state in India enumerated and categorised populations – as communities rather than individuals – in order to 'produce' knowledge about them, fixing them in these identities and shaping the ways in which they came to view themselves.[65] Similar processes of classification and enumeration pervaded British attempts to understand the extent of the 'problem' of 'coloured immigration' in general and the exact Indian percentage of the 'coloured' population in particular. Given the ways in which 'documents sometimes create citizens instead of the other way around,' I show that in deciphering the eligibility of particular citizens to hold British passports, British officials produced interesting if awkward categorisations of their racial status. As F. A. K. Harrison of the CRO tellingly noted while using the term 'Indian race': 'I did not much like that word.'[66]

Of the many misgivings felt by British officials about the entry of immigrants from India, perhaps the most significant was the question of how 'obviously' British they were, and how assimilable these particular British subjects from the subcontinent were in

---

[62] The term finds reference in police reports about Indian and Pakistani immigrants. Report by F. W. Burgan, 27.4.58, HO 344/151, 'Police information about organisers of immigration. Replies to a Home Office questionnaire concerning race relations that was sent to police forces across the country', TNA

[63] Martin A. Wainwright, *The Better Class' of Indians: Social Rank, Imperial Identity, and South Asians in Britain*, 1858–1914. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 126

[64] See Mongia, 'Race, Nationality, Mobility,' 553

[65] This is a vast scholarship, but a few notable examples include Arjun Appadurai, 'Number in the Colonial Imagination' in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament,* eds, Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) and Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001)

[66] Note by F. A. K. Harrison, 30.7.55, DO35/6387, 'Indian citizenship legislation', TNA

comparison to other races, notably the West Indians. These discussions often sought to clarify the level of desirability of Indians for the British nation-state. A 1958 internal report on the 'problems' arising from the influx of coloured immigrants noted the differences between West Indian immigrants who are 'mostly of a good type who fit fairly easily into British society', and Indians and Pakistanis who 'are greatly handicapped by their inability to speak English and their lack of any kind of skill'. Indeed, the class backgrounds of immigrants entering Britain from the subcontinent, who were 'mostly unskilled simple peasants who know no English', seemed 'ominous' to the British.[67]

As we have seen in Chapter 2, the entangled status of Indians especially until the legislation of the Indian citizenship act in 1955 necessarily meant that British officials acted as passport issuing authorities for Indians – be they British subjects without citizenship or Indian UKC citizens. This often necessitated the grant of UK passports based on racial 'common sense and humane considerations' to white persons born in India who were 'obviously' British even if they did not legally qualify as either UKC citizens or citizens of any other Commonwealth country.[68] In confidential instructions sent to British missions in countries where there was Indian diplomatic representation, they noted that those 'obviously of British European descent, need not be referred to the Indian representative, but may be granted a UK passport if a new one is required.'[69] This 'bureaucratic discretion'[70] to enable racism provided for the grant of a UK passport to ensure that despite their clear legal status as potential Indian citizens, white persons would not be subjected to the possibility of Indian citizenship. In the words of F. H. Cleobury, 'The granting of a passport is not, fortunately, a matter in which, as in the case of registration of the Act, we are tied to the letter and we must allow ourselves freedom.'[71]

Such 'commonsensical' and 'compassionate' bestowals of passports to white persons in order to extend UK citizenship to them also produced a new 'non-racial' term to describe them: 'British European'.[72] This curious term had first been introduced as a

[67] Home Office Draft progress report to Ministers, 13.1.58, HO 344/149, 'Trend of Indian and Pakistani Immigration', TNA
[68] F. C. Cleobury to Toy, 12.8.49, DO142/252, 'Passport policy in India and Pakistan', TNA
[69] H. Ward to Cleobury, 6 .8. 49, DO142/252, TNA
[70] Mongia, 'Race, Nationality, Mobility,' 545
[71] Cleobury to Toy, 12.8.49, DO142/252, TNA
[72] Toy to Shepherd, 20.7.49, DO142/252, TNA

racial category in application forms for those seeking to register for UKC citizenship.[73] Indeed, given that millions of 'coloured' people could also lay claim to the term 'British', the new formulation of 'British European' race would assert the whiteness of those Britons who had a special claim to Britishness.[74] In one case where British officials recommended that an Indian seaman in much the same circumstances as white passport applicants be referred instead to the Indian representative for passport facilities, Cleobury noted:

> The obvious grounds for differentiating his case from those who I have mentioned above are that of race or colour. I do not see how it is possible to avoid this although we cannot admit it openly![75]

This was in line with colonial usages of the British Indian passport: by not naming race but codifying it as a 'national attribute' in the document, Dominion and colonial officials were able to 'effect racial exclusion without naming race' or colour.[76] While this strategy of erasing race would be seemingly easier to implement with the independence of India, the BNA and the putative racial equality of all 'British subjects' complicated this, resulting in the construction of categories of 'Indian race' and 'British European' race. Internal correspondence however clearly spelled out the exact meaning of the latter: those of 'pure white British European stock'.[77] Dominions like Australia on the other hand sought to ingeniously limit the entry of non-white holders of UK passports by demarcating them on the basis of the region in which they acquired their passport. That is, if UK passports were issued outside the geographical borders of the UK itself, these persons were required to get additional authorisation to enter Australia.[78]

The British need to define an 'Indian race' also stemmed from their persistent fear of the seemingly invisible and unaccounted number of Indians who utilised UKC and British colonial passports to enter the United Kingdom. The passport's role in subsuming race as a 'national attribute' now ironically meant that those who held UK passports were not

---

[73] See Sarah Ansari, 'Subjects or Citizens? India, Pakistan and the 1948 British Nationality Act,' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 41, no. 2 (2013), 290

[74] Cleobury to Ward, 29.6.49, DO142/252, TNA

[75] Cleobury to Ward, 29.6.49, DO142/252, TNA

[76] Mongia, 'Race, Nationality, Mobility,' 550

[77] Toy to Shepherd, 20.7.49, DO142/252, TNA

[78] K. I. Jones to Toy, 31.8.49, DO142/252, TNA

classified by Immigration Officers as anything other than 'UK nationals'. [79] British officials seeking to find out the exact number of those of 'Indian race' in the United Kingdom struggled to find such a number, given that 'only people traveling with Indian passports are classified as 'Indians' by Immigration officers.'[80] Similarly, those Indians born in British colonies who either held British colonial passports of the colony in question or had UKC passports after registering as UKC citizens, were also not counted as 'Indians' by immigration authorities. This created another problem for officials seeking to identify the exact number of people of 'Indian race' entering the UK:

> Unfortunately, we have no statistics which will help, because as a general rule, a coloured British subject is classified for the purposes of the HO immigration statistics as belonging to the territory in which his passport was issued (eg. Holders of Kenya passports are classified as 'East Africans'), whilst those who hold United Kingdom passports are classified according to their places of birth.[81]

The 'winds of change' engulfing British colonies and former colonial territories in 1960 spurred further fears among officials that this would prompt the increasing movement of Indians to the United Kingdom.[82] British officials frantically attempted to keep track of the movement of Indians from regions as diverse as Malaya, Singapore, Fiji, Uganda, and Kenya, by calculating the number of colonial passports sent for endorsement to travel to the UK. Since colonial passports 'generally are only endorsed for the holders' immediate journey', officials scrutinised them with fear that all those who held a passport were on their way to their 'Eldorado': Britain.[83] As Wickson noted, 'I was somewhat shattered today to be presented with a large batch of 34 British passports (the majority of them colonial ones) for clearance prior to the holders (all Sikh) going to the UK.'[84] Moreover, officials viewed with great suspicion the fact that these passport-holders wanted to add the details of their children to their passports: 'we often suspect these (children) are not their own … (they are) making some money on the side taking three or four youths with them.'[85] Even as they discounted more paranoid suggestions that many Indians travelled to colonial territories simply in order to register for UKC status and travel to Britain,

---

[79] See Mongia, 'Race, Nationality, Mobility,' 529.
[80] M. P. Preston to Chadwick, 30.9.58, DO 35/1036, 'Issue of UK passports by UK High Commission in New Delhi to UK citizens of Indian race', TNA
[81] M. P. Preston to D. W. H. Wickson, 5.11.58 , DO 35/1036, TNA
[82] D. W. H. Wickson to A. H. G. Pope, 3.10.60, DO 35/1036, TNA
[83] D. W. H. Wickson to A. H. G. Pope, 3.8.60, DO 35/1036, TNA
[84] D. W. H. Wickson to A. H. G. Pope, 21.9.60, DO 35/1036, TNA
[85] D. W. H. Wickson to A. H. G. Pope, 3.8. 60, DO 35/1036, TNA

British officials feared that those 'whose passports were not endorsed for the UK may have found their way here' simply by virtue of holding passports.[86]

This was another number of people they simply could not enumerate, given the bureaucratic tendency to rely on the passport's replacement of race with nationality as the defining category of identity. Moreover, as long as these clearly 'undesirable' persons held any passport – be it an Indian passport, British colonial passport or a UKC passport – 'there is not much to stop them.'[87] Indeed, even as they critiqued the tendency of colonial governments to register people of 'Indian race' as UKC citizens 'too easily and uncritically', as in the case of one Mr Asa Singh, they acknowledged that it was impossible to deny Singh an endorsement to enter the United Kingdom.[88] According to M. P. Preston, it was one thing for Indian officials and authorities of colonial governments to restrict the issue and endorsement of passports, but yet another for the British to 'restrict the endorsement of a UK passport held by a UK citizen who apparently does not "belong" to a colony' (underlined in original):

> We cannot see how we could justify a refusal to endorse his passport as he requests … little real point in refusing the endorsement since Asa Singh will no doubt soon discover (if he does not already know) that he will not be refused leave to land in the UK even if he arrives with his passport not endorsed for the UK.[89]

The possession of any passport as a British subject thus meant potentially being able to enter Britain – a prospect that terrified British officials who were unable to prevent their entry legally and were already struggling to enumerate and negotiate the influx of Indians, whose racial status had seemingly submerged under the 'national' identity of colonial and UKC passports. The solution therefore lay in preventing the acquisition of passports in the first place – a policy that British officials called on an amenable Indian government to follow, given the rising influx of Indian passport holders migrating to Britain.

THE 'HONOUR' OF THE INDIAN PASSPORT

In 1956, the extraordinary Garry Davis – self-proclaimed 'World Citizen' who had

[86] M. P. Preston to Chadwick, 30.9.58, DO 35/1036, TNA
[87] D. W. H. Wickson to C. H. Butterfield, 14.3.60, DO 35/1036, TNA
[88] M. P. Preston to Chadwick , 29.10.58, DO 35/1036, TNA
[89] M. P. Preston to D. W. H. Wickson, 5.11.58 , DO 35/1036, TNA

renounced his American passport and citizenship – entered India carrying what he had termed a 'World Passport'. The World Passport had been carefully designed by Davis, certifying its holder as 'a world-citizen' who would 'try to recognize his responsibilities as a member of the World Community.' On his visit to India, he sought out an important fellow 'world citizen'. Presenting Jawaharlal Nehru with a 'World Passport' and declaring him a 'Sovereign Citizen of the World', Davis recalls telling the Indian Prime Minister that his 'basic principles are of course yours, one world and one mankind.'[90] These ideas, along with the quest for world government, had indeed long been a part of Nehru's vision of international relations.[91] Yet, one must hope that Nehru was aware of the sad irony of being provided a symbolic 'world passport' at a time when the Indian government was actively denying passports to large numbers of its lower caste and class citizens, deeming them 'unskilled' and 'unsuitable' to travel abroad as representatives of India.

Notions of privilege and respectability that served as the guiding principles of granting a passport in colonial India had significant postcolonial afterlives, their relevance seemingly reiterated by notions of these lower caste and class applicants as unpleasant reminders of earlier coolie migrants. Niraja Gopal Jayal has argued that the delay in passing the Indian Passport Act – as late as 1967 –was due to the fact that 'the idea of a passport in the western sense had not … been institutionalized or internalized, so that people acquired passports quite casually without realizing the implications of such an act for nationality and citizenship.'[92] While she draws on the India-Pakistan passport system to make this point, it is highly unlikely that people struggling to get passports to travel to the West – resulting in a forged passport racket – were 'casually' acquiring passports. As the British Indian writer Dilip Hiro recalled, so 'stringent' were the 'educational and financial requirements for successful passport applications' that in 1957, 'in spite of good academic qualifications and financial references, it took the author (sic) six months to secure a passport in India.'[93] Far from being 'casual' acts of acquisition, access to passports was scarce and served as a mechanism through which the second class citizen likely to embarrass India in the West was categorised and thereby contained. From 1946, the Indian government was issuing passports only if guarantees of maintenance and repatriation were provided to ensure that the applicant would not become 'destitute and

[90] Garry Davis, *My Country is the World* (London: MacDonald, 1961), 127.
[91] See Manu Bhagavan, *India and the Quest for One World: The Peacemakers*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)
[92] Jayal, *Citizenship and its Discontents*, 72.
[93] Hiro, *Black British, White British*, 107.

require repatriation at (the) government's expenses.'[94] Such financial concerns would long shape the criterion based on which an applicant's suitability to travel abroad was judged, with monetary limits in place to assess the 'solvency' of an applicant or their guarantor.[95]

Such strict controls following colonial protocols for the issue of passports meant that all those domiciled in India including Europeans and Anglo-Indians – much to the chagrin of the British – would be subjected to these rules. Noting that such rules were being applied far too zealously by Indian authorities, British officials argued that these criterion were designed only for those 'Indian British subjects of a low standard of education and limited means.' Indeed, demanding financial guarantees as a means of denying mobility was a mechanism meant not for 'people of this sort, but people of the Indian pedlar class.'[96] The full or partial whiteness of these special British subjects thus seemed to mean that despite their inability to prove financial resources, they were not to be denied a passport.[97] British officials therefore communicated to the Indian passport authorities that they did not have to ask for proof of maintenance from domiciled Europeans and Anglo-Indians since, it would seem, they were not quite Indians and therefore not the responsibility of the Indian government. As a British official pointed out, 'we should not, in the event of their becoming destitute here, ask the Government of India to accept any financial responsibility for their repatriation.'[98]

Meanwhile, Indian officials had continually recommended to the British throughout the 1950s that they refuse leave to land for Indians whose passports did not have an endorsement – the more lenient equivalent of a visa at that time – for the UK. The British High Commissioner in India, Malcolm Macdonald, approved of this course of action as a means to 'catch the undesirable Indians who leave India ostensibly for other destinations without having their passports endorsed for the UK.'[99] However, Home Office officials repeatedly noted that this proposal was a 'non-starter' since, regardless of

[94] Copy of express letter from Ministry of External Affairs to the Home Secy of the United Provinces, 10.7.46, India Office Records IOR L/PJ/7/11848, 'Passport for Anglo-Indians and Domiciled Europeans: Guarantees of maintenance and repatriation', British Library (BL hereafter)

[95] Letter from Flt Lt H. C. Varma, Regional Passport Officer, Madras to Chief Passport Officer, 20.4.57, File 25/3/57-PVI 'Indian citizens leaving india: form of guarantee to be executed by persons who hold passports', National Archives of India (NAI hereafter)

[96] Rumbold to P. J. Patrick, 20.11.47, IOR L/PJ/7/11848, BL

[97] Rumbold to P. J. Patrick, 20.11.47, IOR L/PJ/7/11848, BL

[98] P. J. Patrick to P. J. Griffiths, 14.2.48, IOR L/PJ/7/11848

[99] C. W. Dixon to J. M. Ross, 25.7.58, HO 344/152, 'Suggestion to refuse leave to land to Indians with passports not valid for UK' , TNA

the lack of endorsement for the UK, the passport itself served as sufficient proof of their nationality and therefore British subject status.[100] Therefore, 'there is no power under the present law to require him to satisfy the immigration officer of anything else as a condition of being allowed to land in this country.'[101] Officials also argued that this proposal would 'only nibble at the main problem' of 'coloured immigration', given that only a small percentage of Indians carried passports not endorsed for the UK.[102] They therefore rejected suggestions to include such a proposal in the draft of the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill that was being prepared then. This would, in the words of J. M. Ross, be an 'extra mesh in an already awkward net, simply for the sake of catching a few extra fish.'[103] Moreover, by outsourcing to other countries the power to approve the entry of British subjects to the UK, they feared that 'we might well find ourselves treating British subjects more harshly than aliens.'[104]

Given that an Indian passport served as an entry ticket into Britain, as proof of Indian citizenship and therefore British subject status, restricting the very possession of such passports rather than requiring special endorsements for the UK was deemed essential for preventing the movement of 'undesirable' Indians to Britain. This was so, even as British officials had long been aware that by asking India to keep a certain lower class/caste category of Indians away from Britain, they had done something which 'we do not ask Canada or Australia to do.'[105] Indian passport applications of such Indians seeking to travel to the United Kingdom were thus referred to the Commonwealth Relations Office, following 'long-standing arrangements' :

> when an Indian or Pakistani who is *illiterate, indigent or of low social status* applies to his government for a passport for the purpose of coming to the UK, the name and address of a sponsor in the UK and information about the purpose of the visit is referred to the appropriate High Commissioner in the UK, who in turn passes the details on to us and we ask the police to interview the sponsor and furnish a report on his character, financial status, business or occupation, when he came to the UK, and how the applicant is likely to be employed if he comes to

[100] B. F. M. Samuel to A. H. G. Pope, 21.3.61, HO 344/152, TNA
[101] J. M. Ross to Charles W. Dixon, 13.8.58, HO 344/152, TNA
[102] C. W. Dixon to J. M. Ross, 25.7.58, HO 344/152, TNA
[103] J. M. Ross to Charles W. Dixon, 13.8.58, HO 344/152, TNA
[104] J. M. Ross to Charles W. Dixon, 13.8.58, HO 344/152, TNA
[105] F. H. Cleobury to Wilson, 4.2.48, DO142/252, TNA

this country[106]

These Indians exemplified what British officials deemed the 'pedlar class': an especially undesirable category of Indians of 'low social status', a clear euphemism for low caste and class status, whose passport applications were almost always rejected. The presence of Indian seamen and other working class Indians who took up peddling in Britain – the most easily accessible form of employment for them during the 1920s and 1930s – had long been a concern for British officials. Indeed attempting to prevent the entry of potential pedlars, the India Office had in 1931 called on the Indian government to warn - potential migrants of the 'wholly erroneous' belief that there was opportunity for 'lucrative employment' as a pedlar or as a seaman and instead indicate to them 'the perils of settling in Britain.'[107]

It is hardly surprising therefore that British officials viewed the entry of 'unskilled' lower class/caste Indians after 1947 as an influx of new additions to the dreaded 'pedlar class'. Indian officials were equally wary of this category of immigrants, as is evident from their response to the passport renewal application of Mr Salig Ram of Dehradun. While the provincial Criminal Investigation Department declared that Ram was eligible to get a passport, this was contested by the District Magistrate who warned that the applicant's financial guarantees were insufficient. Most importantly, Indian officials noted that Salig Ram's existing passport identified his occupation as 'pedlar'. They also suspected that Ram's guarantor – his brother who was already resident in Britain – was not a shopkeeper as claimed and was more likely to be a pedlar himself. This application was forwarded to British officials, calling on them to check the status of Ram's brother Des Raj in Newcastle. Even as Salig Ram 'undertook before the magistrate not to engage in peddling', British officials called for the refusal of a passport stating that 'in the light of enquiries which were made concerning the guarantor Mr Des Raj, it appears probable that should Mr Ram come to the UK, he would engage in peddling.'[108] Ram's case was very much the norm for applicants of such low economic and social status: indeed, as Indian High Commission officials noted in 1953, the British government had turned down as many as 32 applications in the preceding ten months 'solely because the

[106] Letter in file dated 5.1.53 (signature illegible), 'Passport facilities: vetting of applications by Indians and Pakistani pedlars', HO 213/1625, TNA. Italics added.
[107] Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History*, (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 217-218
[108] Letter from District Magistrate, Dehradun, 16.3.48, MEA, PV-I 19(64)-PV(I)/48, 'Refusal of passport facilities for the UK to Mr Salig Ram, S/O Rala Ram', NAI

applicants' guarantors in this country happened to be pedlars.'[109] Yet, given their entangled status as British subjects, the British government had 'not taken exception to the continued stay in this country of Indians of this category who came here a long time ago.'[110]

Many of these early immigrants had obtained licenses from the British government to engage in peddling, although the legalised status of their occupation did little to remove the stigma associated with them. This was as much a grave concern for Indian officials as their British counterparts: indeed Indian High Commission officials had been reluctant to issue fresh Indian passports for pedlars resident in the UK and instead provided them with 'Emergency certificates' that would only allow their return to India.[111] Complicating their status was the fact that the existing passports of many of these applicants did not have 'proper endorsements' for the UK. While this was in violation of India's passport regulations, this did not in itself prohibit their entry into Britain given their possession of a valid passport of a Commonwealth nation. Thus even as they decided to grant new passports to these pedlars after widespread complaints and fears of 'antagonising a large number of Indians', Indian High Commission officials still relied on the criterion of their being 'financially sound' and 'endorsed' their passport only for the UK itself, 'so that they may not visit other countries as pedlars.' [112]

The number of applications referred to the British declined after 1954, leading to further doubts among British officials as to the tangible benefits of this system of restricting migration at its source. British officials were often unsure if their recommendations regarding the refusal of passports to certain applicants were followed by Indian officials; nor did they know the exact criteria based on which applications were referred to them. Indeed, there was much suspicion that Indians found their 'own methods' of getting to the UK, even if the CRO and HO had reported adversely about their eligibility for a passport.[113] As H. W. Savidge of the Home Office noted, they could only hope that there was an overlap between Indian and British definitions of 'undesirable' persons who ought to be denied a passport: 'it seems probable that the Indian govt could expect us to

[109] Letter from P. D. Runganadhan, Indian High Commission to MEA, 21.11.53, PV (I) 26(178)-PV(1), 'Entry of certain categories of indians into the UK without proper endorsement in their passports for the UK', NAI.
[110] P. D. Runganadhan to MEA, 21.11.53, PV (I) 26(178)-PV(1), NAI
[111] P. D. Runganadhan to MEA, 21.11.53, PV (I) 26(178)-PV(1), NAI
[112] P. D. Runganadhan to MEA, 21.11.53, PV (I) 26(178)-PV(1), NAI
[113] Letter from H. Sandys to J. M. Ross, 17.4.57, HO 344/149, TNA

turn back the people they did not wish to come, rather than those whom we wished to reject, but it might well be that these could turn out to be the same in the end.'[114]

Yet is clear that such a mechanism was in place with the cooperation of Indian officials who perceived this to be in their interest. British officials repeatedly asserted that the Indian and Pakistani governments were taking steps to prevent 'working class'[115], 'unskilled and illiterate persons from coming to this country'[116] : these, after all, were persons viewed as 'not likely to do credit to their countries' reputation in the UK.'[117] A Home Office memo even claimed that while they had expected such restrictions to end with the independence of India and Pakistan, it was at the request of the two governments that these arrangements to control the entry of the 'pedlar class' were continued. [118]

Indian acquiescence to these controls was based on a longstanding anxiety of potential national embarrassment caused by the 'unsuitable' lower class and caste Indian – from stereotypes of the coolie to these 'pedlar class' Indians. Indeed while a list of guidelines issued by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs to Regional Passport Officers asked them to avoid pre-conceived notions of the 'ineligibility of any specific class of persons for receiving passports', they were nevertheless warned against granting passports to those who were 'likely to behave in a manner in a foreign country that would lower India in the estimation of foreigners.'[119] It is telling that the applicant's apparent inherent proclivity to humiliate the nation was considered a main criterion for passport rejection, listed alongside other factors such as an applicant's potential to endanger national security and ability to vilify India abroad.[120]

Political 'undesirables' such as members of the Communist Party of India were often denied passports, with Indian officials seeking to provide just enough leeway to plausibly deny charges of bias. I. J. Broughton, Undersecretary of the MEA, pointed out in 1952

[114] Note by H. Savidge, 18.4.57, HO 344/149, TNA
[115] A. F. Morley to Cornish, 9.8.55, HO 344/149, TNA
[116] Home Office Draft progress report to Ministers, 13.1.58, HO 344/149, TNA
[117] Note to I. B. Watt, 7.4.56, HO 344/149, TNA
[118] Letter in file dated 5.1.53 (signature illegible), HO 213/1625, TNA
[119] Letter from MEA to all Passport Issuing Authorities in India and all Indian representatives abroad, 25.7.52, File 20(10)-J/52, 'Instructions from the MEA regarding refusal of Passport Facilities to Indian citizens', NAI
[120] Letter from MEA to all Passport Issuing Authorities in India and all Indian representatives abroad, 25.7.52, File 20(10)-J/52, NAI

that 'prominent and active members of the Communist party should normally not be given passports, but cases of MPs and to some extent members of the assembly have to be considered rather separately. This does not mean that they should invariably be given passports but there must be special reasons for refusing them passports.'[121] By 1960, even as the guidelines were somewhat reformulated to provide passports for all Members of Parliament, local assemblies and councils without calling for financial guarantees or security checks, this nevertheless did not apply to members of the formerly-secessionist Dravidian political parties such as the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam or Dravida Kazhagam which were apparently 'blacklisted.'[122]

The discretionary scope built into the very structure of the passport system was amplified further by the fact that state governments were in charge of granting passports on behalf of the centre until 1954. The Government of India's guidelines – effectively calling on passport officers to define Indian citizens who would not embarrass the nation abroad in order to grant them passports –facilitated clear discriminatory practices in local passport offices. The remarkable memoir of Ishwar Das Pawar, the first Scheduled Caste gazetted officer in Punjab who became the Undersecretary of the Passport department in 1952, makes clear the extent to which discrimination against lower caste applicants was the norm. As he recalls, 'Scheduled caste people would come to me grumbling that they were denied passports for the UK while others got them freely.'[123] This was evident to Pawar in his scrutiny of such applications: he recounts the case of one Scheduled Caste candidate whose application had not been dealt with at the state level as was the rule, but had instead been sent to Government of India, with the facts of the case misrepresented in order to secure a rejection of his passport. Pawar took up the matter with officials in Delhi, who reiterated his view that the case be reconsidered and the candidate be issued a passport. In his memoir, Pawar quotes the letter sent by I. J. Broughton commending his handling of the case:

> As it is our policy to be as liberal as possible in the grant of passports consistent with the security and honour of the country, it should always be the object of state governments to grant passport facilities as freely as they can and only to

[121] Letter from I. J. Broughton, 18.12.52, File 20(10)-J/52, NAI

[122] Minutes of the second conference of the regional passport officers, New Delhi, 6-7 September 1960, File no 21(101) PVI/60, 'Second Conference of the Regional Passport Officers held at New Delhi from 6-7 September 1960: Implementation of the decisions taken', NAI.

[123] Ishwar Das Pawar, *My Struggle in Life* (New York: Page Publishing, 2015) Ebook. See chapter titled 'The Passport Affair'.

> refuse them when the evidence is really strong that the issue of a passport … would be detrimental to our interest … We receive frequent complaints about the arbitrary severity with which the passport rules are administered by the passport authorities[124]

Broughton's representation of the discriminatory grant of passports as a problem of the local implementation of guidelines rather than that of the *guidelines themselves* obfuscates the ways in which, as we have seen, these rules were explicitly designed to exclude those deemed embarrassing for the nation-state. Indeed the very principle of discretionary grant of passports, coupled with strict financial guarantees and educational requirements, enabled bureaucrats to exclude many Indians from the lowest caste and class backgrounds as unworthy of holding a passport. Pawar was one of the exceptions: he attempted to relax the financial requirements for Scheduled Caste applicants and, according to Juergensmeyer, 'helped five hundred SC applicants to emigrate each year.'[125] Pawar movingly recounts his stint in the Passports department:

> … quite a number of *Harijans* were able to get passports for (the) UK …. Many of those families are now in that country, and some of them have acquired citizenship of that land. It gives me great pleasure and unbounded satisfaction to know that they are living there happily and are much better off.[126]

The complications of dealing with passport authorities in the states eventually led to the centralisation of passport authorities in 1954, with the central government setting up its own regional passport offices.[127] This did not however reduce complaints about the arbitrary nature of granting passports, an issue that was more frequently cropping up in Parliamentary debates too. In 1961, Lok Sabha MPs called on the Government to appoint a Parliamentary committee to look into the 'rules and procedures regarding the issuance of passports with a view to eliminating corruption, discrimination and delays.'[128] A conference of the Regional Passport Officers in 1960 had also likewise discussed widespread complaints that passport offices were 'very slow and dilatory' and passports

---

[124] Pawar, *My Struggle in Life.*

[125] Mark Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision: The Movement against Untouchability in 20th century Punjab* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 246

[126] Pawar, *My Struggle in Life.*

[127] File 40(10)-EI/52, Contribution payable to the various states on account of passport work done by them on behalf of Government of India, NAI.

[128] File 23(3)/PVI (61) 'Lok Sabha resolution regarding Committee of MPs to renew the rules regarding issue of passports'

were granted only 'to persons who had good approach … while other applicants had no response.'[129] Lakshmi Menon, the Deputy Minister of External Affairs, argued that there was a great delay in issuing passports 'to even most deserving applicants' and called for a more 'practical and humane approach.'[130] Subimal Dutt, Foreign Secretary by then, concurred and called on officers to adopt an attitude that 'a citizen should be given a Passport unless there are good reasons to the contrary and not that a passport is not to be given until the applicant gives good grounds in his/her application.'[131] These seemingly promising solutions belied the paradoxical conclusions of that same conference: making the passport application process easy, according to these officials, meant expediting the applications of 'persons of good standing.' These persons, they pointed out, should be 'freely' provided endorsements for the countries they sought to travel to and 'if an educated person (graduate and above) or a person of good standing wishes to proceed abroad on a pleasure trip it should not be necessary for RPO to enquire about his travel plans or about financial arrangements made.'[132] Indeed, their further suggestions for 'simplification' of passport procedures included the following incredible proposal:

> It was therefore agreed that in addition to the Chief Ministers and Chief Secretaries of States and Joint Secretaries to the Government of India, if a Secretary/Additional Secretary/Special Secretary/Deputy Secretary to the Government of India or various state governments and a Ist class Magistrate certifies that the applicant is known to him for more than two years … and recommends that the applicant is a fit person to be considered for the grant of passport, the Regional Passport Officers should waive the police and security verification and grant a passport immediately provided the applicant is eligible to receive one otherwise.[133]

The fact that these suggestions for easy access to passports relaxed rules largely for

[129] Minutes of the second conference of the regional passport officers, New Delhi, 6-7 September 1960, File no 21(101) PVI/60, NAI.
[130] Minutes of the second conference of the regional passport officers, New Delhi, 6-7 September 1960, File no 21(101) PVI/60, NAI.
[131] Minutes of the second conference of the regional passport officers, New Delhi, 6-7 September 1960, File no 21(101) PVI/60, NAI
[132] Minutes of the second conference of the regional passport officers, New Delhi, 6-7 September 1960, File no 21(101) PVI/60, NAI
[133] Minutes of the second conference of the regional passport officers, New Delhi, 6-7 September 1960, File no 21(101) PVI/60, NAI

'persons of good standing' only, further illuminates the entirely discriminatory process of granting a passport. It is unsurprising therefore that such policies led to a thriving market for forged passports utilised by those not privileged enough to be personally acquainted with senior government officials.

FORGING PASSPORTS, FORGING IDENTITY

> Conditioned to a world of permits, licenses, paper controls of all sorts, the canny Indian knows only too well that these things exist, as have other inflictions upon him by his rulers from time immemorial, only to be got round.[134]

This excerpt from a *Sunday Telegraph* report echoes the widespread perception of British officials for whom the 'canny', innately untruthful Indian immigrant was a subject of great distrust. In the 1950s, these anxieties were exemplified by the controversy over forged passports utilised by Indian and Pakistani immigrants to bypass restrictions on their movement. Concerns over the scale of organised rackets in India and Pakistan to provide fake documents facilitating immigration into Britain became a significant diplomatic issue. Routine police reports on coloured immigrants that explored everything from their 'assimilation into populace' to 'miscegenation' and 'illegitimacy' warned that they 'strongly suspected that there are unscrupulous agents contacting applicants for passports' in Pakistan and India.[135] The overwhelming notion of the immigrant as a suspect figure was shaped by the illegitimacy or lack of a paper trail and what was seen as the particular proclivity of Indian and Pakistani immigrants for documentary discrepancies over their identity. Indeed, the physical characteristics of some Indians – Sikhs in particular – were seen as facilitating the deception of forged passports, with one newspaper claiming that 'it was very difficult very often even for Indians to tell one bearded Sikh from another from his passport picture' and therefore unscrupulous agents could easily 'acquire legal documents and pass them over to a client.'[136]

Police distrust of the evidentiary value of the immigrant's documents extended to the identities of their family, with widespread suspicion that 'adults, who are not necessarily

---

[134] Stephen Barber, 'A Passage to England,' *Sunday Telegraph*, November 17, 1961

[135] Report by G. A Cahill titled 'Sheffield's Coloured Population' and dated March 1958, HO 344/151, 'Police information about organisers of immigration. Replies to a Home Office questionnaire concerning race relations that was sent to police forces across the country', TNA. The use of forged passports was equally, if not more, widespread in Pakistan.

[136] Barber, 'A Passage to England.'

members of the same family, manage to get their names included in the wives' passports together with those of the minor children' and therefore easily entered Britain.[137] This seemed par for the course to British officials, who pointed to the 'well-known natural tendency (of Indian and Pakistani immigrants) to lie and be evasive when approached by the police'[138] and the Sikhs' reputation of being 'natural inveterate liars'. [139] There was also considerable paranoia about the increasing numbers of unemployed immigrants registered to receive National Assistance money which they allegedly sent back to family and agents to whom they owed money in India or Pakistan.[140]

With increasing focus on the 'extent to which, and the manner in which, this immigration is organised', British police reports about the techniques utilised by immigrants to defy passport restrictions were passed on to the Indian and Pakistani High Commissions. Huddersfield police described how 'after an Indian arrives in this country, he returns his passport to one of his compatriots who substitutes his own photograph and then uses the passport to travel to this country.'[141] Newspapers reported of a network of 'big uncle organisations' engaged in a form of 'slave trading' through which they enabled the immigrant's travel to Britain and in turn took over all their wages (and property owned if any).[142] They also claimed that 'unskilled' Indians obtained passports by claiming to travel to a 'more convenient' country, typically any non-Western country.[143] Officials alleged rather remarkable instances of border crossing in order to bypass India's strict passport guidelines, where Indians – particularly from the Punjab – crossed 'over the border into Pakistan and are obtaining passports by posing as Pakistanis.'[144]

Increasing pressure from Britain – spurred by reports that almost 20,000 Indians had entered Britain using fake passports in the mid 1950s – resulted in a range of efforts by India to tackle the growing problem, focusing especially on tracing and prosecuting the agents and travel companies that were widely acknowledged as masterminding the racket.

---

[137] Letter from H. W. Savidge to M. P. Preston with note on immigration of Indians and Pakistanis, 12.5.58, HO 344/151, TNA

[138] Report by William R. Scott on 'Coloured Immigrants in Walsall', 28.4.58, HO 344/151, TNA

[139] Letter from Chief Constable, Huddersfield, to Sir Charles Cunningham, 11.4.58, HO 344/151, TNA

[140] These allegations persisted despite internal correspondence admitting that there was no evidence. See file AST 7/1614, 'Payment of National Assistance to immigrants from India and Pakistan', TNA

[141] Letter from Chief Constable, Huddersfield, to Sir Charles Cunningham, 11.4.58, HO 344/151, TNA

[142] 'Fear keeps 'slaves' silent,' *Daily Express*, April 26, 1958

[143] 'Fear keeps 'slaves' silent,' *Daily Express*, April, 26, 1958,

[144] Letter from Chief Constable, Huddersfield, to Sir Charles Cunningham, 11.4.58, HO 344/151, TNA

[145] By 1954, Indian officials were aware of travel agents in Delhi and Calcutta who had sent 'more than 300 unsuitable persons' to the UK on forged passports by colluding with staff of airline companies and complicit local passport issuing officers.[146] For British officials, it was essential that India address the problem since the possession of a forged Indian passport, while a crime in Indian law, could *not* be proceeded against in Britain if this was discovered long after they had entered Britain.

Many Indians sought to travel by ship to bypass growing scrutiny at airports. One sizeable group holding forged passports sailed from Cochin to Italy in October 1959, from where they travelled via Calais to Dover. Some 138 were held in Italy, while others were detained upon their entry into Britain via France. This transnational journey severely complicated things for all governments involved: while British officials ordered the Indians who had reached Britain to return to Calais, French officials refused to permit their entry and sent them back again to Britain.[147] In an alarmed front page article titled 'Fake Passports Mystery', the *Daily Herald* described the 'amazing see-saw' between Britain and France over who should assume the burden of the Indian 'invasion' (including the use of makeshift jails in Canterbury and Essex to detain the unwanted arrivals).[148] The Italian authorities meanwhile insisted that the Indian government pay for their repatriation.[149] The Government of India's response to this crisis was somewhat astounding: not only did India initially refuse to bear the expenses for their repatriation, it also claimed that there was no proof that these forged passport-holders were Indian citizens. Indeed, a Home Office spokesperson described the detained Indians as those of 'uncertain nationality.'[150] As Nehru argued in the Rajya Sabha:

> When a person has a forged passport, nobody knows what nationality he belongs to. It is only after a due enquiry that one can say. All that one can say is that these people are apparently people of Indian origin. People of Indian origin go from Hong Kong, Singapore and, I am afraid, all places other than India. Therefore,

[145] Numbers range from 17000 to 20000. See Talvinder Gill, 'The Indian Workers' Association Coventry 1938–1990: political and social action', *South Asian History and Culture*, 4, no. 4, (2013), 560.

[146] Letter from K. F. Rustomji to I. J. Broughton, 12.2.54, File 26(I87)- PV (I)/53, 'Application of Shri Santok Singh and 12 others through MS Air India international, Calcutta to Passport Officer, Bihar for endorsements on their passports for the UK', NAI.

[147] See Nehru's letter to Partap Singh Kairon, 20 November 1959, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (SWJN hereafter), Second Series, Vol 54, (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 2014) Also see *Daily Herald*, 26 October 1959 , 'Fake Passport Mystery'.

[148] 'Fake Passport Mystery,' *Daily Herald*, October 26, 1959.

[149] Nehru to Partap Singh Kairon, 20 November 1959, *SWJN*, Vol 54.

[150] 'Forged Indian Passports: 23 Held in Ports and Airfield,' *Birmingham Daily Post*, October 26, 1959

> we were actually asked by the British government: 'Are these Indian nationals or not?' The only answer we could give was that unless we had a thorough enquiry made, we could not say for certain.[151]

Indeed, Nehru reiterated somewhat implausibly that British officials were deporting these persons 'back' to India 'on the clear understanding that we do not accept their nationality – it may or may not be so – without further enquiries.'[152] The Indian government even attempted to place the onus on the shipping company to bring these individuals back to their port of departure in India, a suggestion the Italian government refused on the grounds that the 'passports of these persons had been checked and pronounced valid by the Indian checkposts prior to embarkation.'[153]

With growing reports of the 'miserable conditions' of the Indians detained in Italy until their status could be decided, India finally enabled their repatriation to face trial 'back home' on the condition that the cost of repatriation would be repaid by the individuals concerned.[154] These lower class and caste Indians had long been regarded as unworthy of an official Indian passport and particularly humiliating as representatives of India in the international realm. The Indian state interpreted their use of forged passports – for which they paid large amounts to agents, often pledging their property – as bringing into question their very claim to Indianness, reiterating the state's long held view of their status as problematic, indeed embarrassing citizens. Nehru bemoaned that these individuals had created 'an international scandal ... which has brought us much discredit.'[155]

Due to the large scale of Punjabi immigration to Britain, the region was a central focus for Indian officials who viewed it as the epicentre of the forged passports crisis. Writing to the Chief Minister of Punjab Partap Singh Kairon, Nehru pointed out that the 'major operations appear to have been in the Punjab, but it is quite possible that the brains behind it are in Delhi.' Given the significant organisational machinery behind printing fake passports and the suspicion that 'a number of fairly prominent men including policemen' were involved, a Central Special Police team had been enlisted to carry out

---

[151] Nehru's statement in the Rajya Sabha, 26 Nov 1959, *SWJN,* Vol 54.
[152] Nehru's statement in the Rajya Sabha, 26 Nov 1959, *SWJN*, Vol 54.
[153] Discussion in the Lok Sabha on 'Indians Stranded in Italy', 4 March 1960, *SWJN*, Second Series, Vol 58 (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 2014)
[154] Discussion in the Lok Sabha on 'Indians Stranded in Italy'*, SWJN*, Vol 58
[155] Nehru to Partap Singh Kairon, 20 November 1959, *SWJN,* Vol 54.

investigations.[156] By November 1959, several travel agents from Punjab had been arrested and were facing trial, a fact that caused some consternation in the Lok Sabha.[157] While one Member of Parliament's remark that 'all these things happen in Punjab only (sic)' drew protest, the Prime Minister argued that this could be better understood by realising that 'the people of Punjab are more enthusiastic, they are hot-blooded; that is why they progress, and sometimes fight among themselves.'[158] While these imponderables were vigorously debated, it was left to MP Iqbal Singh to draw the more considered conclusion that 'most of the (passport) applications from Punjab are rejected and that is why they are compelled' to find other means to travel. [159]

Meanwhile, the anxious Indian community in Britain was represented by a delegation from the Indian Workers Association (IWA) who met with Nehru during his visit to London for the Commonwealth Prime Ministers conference in May 1960. While they stressed the gullibility and innocence of these 'simple people' exploited by agents and facing the ire of governments for carrying forged passports, the IWA did so by adopting the government's narrative of the status of overseas Indians as representative of India's honour. In their memorandum, they emphasised the 'serious difficulties, embarrassment and humiliation' faced by Indian immigrants in Britain due to the inaction of the government in resolving a crisis created by powerful 'crooked agents.' Some of these agents were, they alleged, Government officials. Indeed, they pointed out:

> It has lowered the prestige of the Indian government in the eyes of the common man and accentuated the atmosphere of colour prejudice. Every Indian is suspected of possessing a forged passport.[160]

While Nehru did not absolve those who had travelled using forged passports of their responsibility and indeed emphasised the fact that they would face legal prosecution were they in India, he recognised the potential statelessness of such persons if they were not granted either an Indian or British passport. Eventually, in many of these cases, the Indian High Commission was moved to issue valid passports on 'humanitarian

---

156 Nehru to Partap Singh Kairon, 20 November 1959, *SWJN*, Vol 54.

157 Reported in *The Tribune*, 12 November 1959, and reiterated in Nehru's letter to Partap Singh Kairon, 20 November 1959, *SWJN,* Vol 54.

158 Discussion in the Lok Sabha on 'Forged Passport Cases in Punjab', 2 May 1961, *SWJN*, Vol 68,

159 Discussion on 'Forged Passports Racket', May 24, 1962, Lok Sabha debates, Third series, Vol 3, (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat), 6375

160 Memorandum presented by the Indian Workers Association to Nehru, 13 May 1960*, SWJN* (Second series), Vol 60. (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 2014)

grounds.'[161] The IWA's recourse to the rhetorical device of besmirched honour to legitimise their concerns meant that the nexus between government officials and businesses, and the highly restrictive passport policy was held responsible for tarnishing India's reputation. Indeed, their remarkably blunt memo to the PM called for a liberalisation of the government's general policy of issuing passports long before the 1967 Supreme Court judgement.[162]

This crisis of forged passports exemplifies the fissures of caste, class transcended by those who had defied the government's criterion of an ideal Indian migrant and the ways in which this shaped the Indian diplomatic response. Despite Nehru's reiteration of these immigrants as 'undesirable' representatives of India, the forged passports crisis reiterated Indian diplomacy's continual engagement with Indian migrants and overseas Indians, complicating the oft-quoted notion of diplomatic distance from the lower class/caste diaspora after 1947. Indeed, as Nehru wrote in a letter to MEA officials,

> The fact that some of these people may misbehave … should not lead us to cut them off from our High Commission's activities here … there should be close and continuing contact with them. We may be able to help them a little. But what is more important is to create an impression among large numbers of Indian workers here that we are interested in their welfare.[163]

As a result of this scandal, stricter guidelines were put in place for a brief period from 1959-60, making 'illiterate or semi-illiterate Indians' who did not know English ineligible for an Indian passport. Deputy Minister of External Affairs Lakshmi Menon explained that this ban applied to those intending to travel to the West since such people 'who went to Britain to earn a living by petty trades or unskilled labour found it difficult to adjust themselves to the new conditions of life, particularly since they lacked a knowledge of English.'[164] Moreover, by traveling on forged passports, these persons had brought 'discredit' to India.[165] As Nehru pointed out, the Government was keen on

---

[161] 'Immigration of Indians into UK,' *India News*, October 21, 1961.

[162] Memorandum presented by the Indian workers association to Nehru, *SWJN, Vol 60*

[163] Nehru's letter to M. J. Desai, S. Dutt, V. Pandit, 15 May 1960, 'Travails of the Indian community in London', *SWJN, Vol 60*

[164] 'No illiterate Indian allowed to travel to Britain,' *The Guardian*, August 30, 1960

[165] Indiagram, 11 November 1959, 'India adopts measure to prevent emigration of illiterates to UK'. The Indian government's requirement of an English test and its persistent concern about the illiterate nature of these immigrants has a stark precedent in the colonial usage of the literacy test as an 'instrument of racial

checking the movement of 'unsuitable persons … who are liable to cause social or economic friction abroad.'[166]

CONCLUSION

The Commonwealth Immigrants bill, tabled in November 1961, sought to control the immigration of Commonwealth passport-holders and introduced the need for work vouchers and other guarantees in order to enter the United Kingdom. This marked the first major legislative culmination of British fears about unhindered coloured immigration and the uninhibited access provided by passports of Commonwealth countries – especially for West Indians, Indians and Pakistanis – under the BNA. In a discussion in Parliament about the bill, the MP for Southall noted the special contribution of the Indian government in restricting the entry of undesirables:

> No Government tried more to regulate its emigration than did India. I do not know whether we helped the Indian Government particularly in that respect – I do not think that we did – but if there was one country with which we could have discussed what could be done to strengthen its method of controlling emigration and ours of controlling immigration, it was India.[167]

Indeed, the Indian government had also noted their concern about the lack of consultations on these restrictions in their aide memoire to the British government in October 1961. In a statement in the Lok Sabha, the Deputy External Affairs Minister Lakshmi Menon reminded her colleagues that while the British had permitted the entry of Indians whose passports they had not endorsed, the Indian Government had itself exercised strict restrictions: 'We ourselves are against illiterate or semi-literate Indians going to the UK or to any other country in search of employment.'[168] Thus, India had no problem with these particular illiterate, lower caste and class Indians being refused entry into Britain and in fact encouraged such restrictions. As long as the British lived up to

---

exclusion.' See Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds. *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 5

[166] 'More Indians returning than leaving home,' *The Statesman,* March 10, 1960,

[167] Remarks by G. A. Pargiter, 16 November 1961, 'Commonwealth Immigrants Bill', HC Deb vol 649 cc 687-819
http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1961/nov/16/commonwealth-immigrants-bill

[168] Statement to be made by Deputy Minister for EA on the floor of LS on 4 Dec 1961 in response to calling attention notices regarding the immigration control legislation introduced by the Govt of the UK, Mss Eur F158/173 'Immigration: India - to England mainly & re Immigration control legislation introduced by UK Govt, BL.

their assurances that 'the restrictions which are now proposed to be imposed will not operate on the basis of colour', Nehru assured them that India would understand the sovereign right of a nation to control its borders.[169]

Indeed, as long as the elite, 'highly skilled', upper class and caste Indians were permitted to enter Britain, there was no question of racial discrimination. The un-assimilable, 'unsuitable', 'unskilled', 'pedlar class' of Indians were, after all, a secondary class of Indians: discrimination against them was not racial, but understandable and even warranted. These 'undesirables' were the very embodiment of the problematic nature of coloured/Indian immigrants and therefore, it seemed to the Indian government, not Indian enough for restrictions against them to count as racial discrimination. By bringing disgrace and embarrassment to India, these undesirables were not the best representatives of the Indian nation in the West and thus, British restrictions on their entry – given that the Indian government itself had long been complicit – could not be considered 'racist'. Indeed, as A. F. Morley of the CRO had earlier noted in a letter: the Indians had 'expressed *undisguised pleasure'* that the Home Office 'found it possible to turn back certain would-be migrants.'[170]

As we have seen, the Indian Supreme Court ruled in a revolutionary judgement in 1967 that any 'person living in India has a fundamental right to travel abroad.'[171] It is worth engaging with the statement of the dissenting judges who argued that 'unfair' refusal of passports could be challenged in court, but should not form the basis of making passports available to all. They pointed out that the 'right to travel is not included in personal liberty' in the Constitution, since India could not guarantee that those who travel abroad will be admitted into other countries. According to them, a passport could not be demanded in the same way a railway ticket could, given that the 'Government places in the hands of a person a document which pledges the honour of the country … it is entitled to scrutinise the credentials of such a person.'[172] Indeed, unlike the USA where 'travel is a means of spending one's wealth', the right to hold a passport and travel abroad was apparently not meant for poor Indians who had to be content with a railway

[169] 'Mr Nehru prefers visa system,' *The Times*, December 5 1961.
[170] A. F. Morley to W. H. Cornish, 9 Aug 1955, HO 344/149, TNA. Italics added.
[171] Satwant Singh Sawhney vs D. Ramarathnam, assistant Passport Officer, Government of India, 1967 AIR 1836. Available at https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1747577/
[172] Dissenting arguments of Judges M. Hidayatullah and R. S. Bachawat. Satwant Singh Sawhney vs D. Ramarathnam, assistant Passport Officer, Government of India, 1967 AIR 1836. Available at https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1747577/

ticket. As the dissenting judges noted:

> What we are concerned with is a slender body of persons whose travel abroad is considered harmful to the larger interests of our nation and who themselves *are in any event undesirable emissaries of our nation* and who might, if allowed to go abroad, cause many complications.[173]

This reading of the passport as a document of honour to be given only to those whose respectability could be vouched for, is very much in line with both the colonial Indian state's treatment of the passport as a privilege for loyal, elite Indians and the postcolonial Indian government's categorisation of 'unsuitable' Indians as ineligible for a passport to travel to the West. These unsuitable Indians were in many ways legatees of the coolie, both of whom were regarded as 'undesirable emissaries' of the Indian state – indeed British officials too referred to the new wave of migrants into Britain interchangeably as 'pedlar class' and 'coolie class' Indians. Euphemisms and vocabularies of caste and class are omnipresent in this discourse about those deemed 'suitable' to be an Indian passport-holder, reiterating Mahmoud Keshavarz's succinct observation that 'passports are material evidence of exercising discrimination.'[174] A moving obituary for Ishwar Das Pawar, the Scheduled Caste officer in Punjab whose efforts had ensured that lower caste applicants obtained their passports, noted the extent to which he was an exception to the norm:

> (his) contribution to the upliftment of the community would be remembered for ever … Earlier it was really very difficult for the SCs to receive the passport (sic) from the upper caste officers.[175]

The structural discrimination enabled by the passport system relied on the overlapping narratives of 'coolie'/'undesirable'/'unskilled'/'pedlar-class' Indians – stark continuities from colonial to postcolonial discourse.

---

[173] Dissenting arguments of Judges M. Hidayatullah and R. S. Bachawat. Satwant Singh Sawhney vs D. Ramarathnam, assistant Passport Officer, Government of India, 1967 AIR 1836. Available at https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1747577/ Italics added.

[174] Mahmoud Keshavarz, *The Design Politics of the Passport : Materiality, Immobility and Dissent* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2019), 2.

[175] Ambedkar Times, 15 June 2007, 'Ishwar Das Pawar Passed Away' http://www.ambedkartimes.com/the_news3.html

5

THE 'UNSKILLED' INDIAN IMMIGRANT

THE EVERYDAY DIPLOMACY OF PUBLIC HEALTH

> 'As I was saying to a group of students the other day, we are all ambassadors of our country. We should behave like ambassadors. I was discussing the subject with Mrs Wilkins – Mrs Wilkins is the lady I am staying with. She said, Mr Singh, if there were more Indians like you … '
>
> 'There'd be none of this ere prejudice,' we added.[1]

In Khushwant Singh's acerbic short story titled *Mr Singh and the Colour Bar,* the eponymous 'Mr Singh' was the most desirable Indian in Britain. Sophisticated, refined, and popular among the British people, he was the exemplar for undesirable, uncouth, 'unskilled' Indians desperately in need of tutoring to fit into British society. Indeed Mr Singh held that this particularly embarrassing category of Indians had in some measure caused the backlash and racial prejudice prevalent in Britain. In his words:

> Every single case of colour prejudice you examine closely, you will see that some Indian or the other has gone and misbehaved … Our boys stretch their hands across the table to help themselves before even the ladies have taken anything. They belch loudly. They sit on their haunches on lavatory seats and make them dirty. They splash water in the bathrooms by pouring it over themselves with a lota instead of lying gently in the long baths. These things cause unpleasantness and unpleasantness causes prejudice.[2]

Khushwant Singh's uncomfortably vivid description of the etiquette and 'bathroom manners' of these 'unskilled' Indians excavates a narrative of humiliation: the identity of these Indians and their assimilation into British society was reducible to their dirt and filth. This chapter examines how such narratives pervaded both British and Indian discourse about the 'unskilled Indian', producing him as a dual threat to Britain's public health and India's international reputation. I am therefore interested in examining the

[1] Khushwant Singh, *Collected Stories* (New Delhi: Penguin/Viking, 2007, online edition), 240.
[2] Singh, *Collected Stories*, 239.

anxieties of British officials and Indian diplomats about the arrival of 'dirty', 'unclean', 'unsuitable' Indian immigrants, interrogating the ways in which notions of caste and race are integral to ideas of hygiene and cleanliness. In so doing, this chapter reads the discourse on the Indian immigrant threat to 'public health' very much as diplomatic history, by investigating the Indian High Commission's role in mediating immigrant behaviour, hygiene and sanitation. The state of the immigrant home and neighbourhood was an issue of great concern for Indian diplomats who responded to frequent complaints from British officials and the immigrants themselves by nominating 'Welfare Officers' from their missions and opening a new consulate in Birmingham, a city receiving a significant influx of Indian immigrants and the subject of much sociological curiosity. I interrogate these instances of everyday diplomacy as a space to recover discourses of caste that circulate through euphemisms of hygiene and inform Indian diplomatic attempts to delineate an ideal Indian identity in the international realm.

This interaction between Indian diplomats and 'unskilled Indians' presented drastically different narratives of Indian identity that were intertwined with the question of acceptability in British society. Indian diplomats exemplified the ideal upper class, upper caste, Anglicised, Western-educated Indians who were deemed most suited to represent India in the international realm and welcomed in Britain as an impressive hybrid category: Indians whose elite status in Indian society was complimented by a sufficiently British upbringing. In stark contrast, the 'unskilled' Indians of lower caste and class origins had evaded the Indian state's attempts to confine them within India and were now seen as reiterating uncomfortable narratives of India as a land of filth, and Indians as inherently unhygienic – reminiscent of the reputation of the coolie. For elite Indian diplomats gravely concerned about the 'shameful' narratives of Indianness embodied by the unsanitary 'unskilled Indian', their (in)ability to assimilate into British society was also a larger discourse on India's capacity for modernity. In this reading, the acceptability of Indian immigrants in British society was dependent on their ability to take after the ideal, desirable Indian identity exemplified by Indian diplomats. Indeed, as Mr Singh notes in the short story, the discrimination faced by 'unskilled' Indians in Britain would end if only they could learn European etiquette and 'behave like ambassadors.'[3]

[3] Singh, *Collected Stories*, 240. It is worth noting that the author Khushwant Singh had served as an Information Officer in the Indian High Commission in London under Krishna Menon. See his autobiography for more details of his tenure, including a reference to the incident in Canada that inspired the story of 'Mr Singh and the Colour Bar'. Khushwant Singh, *Truth, Love and a Little Malice: An Autobiography* (New Delhi: Penguin Books in association with Ravi Dayal Publisher, 2002), 116-153.

This chapter therefore examines the Indian High Commission's engagement with 'unskilled' Indian immigrants in Britain – acting 'in loco parentis', according to one observer – as a discourse on Indian identity and aptitude for modernity, imbued with narratives of caste and class as hygiene.[4] In so doing, it goes beyond frameworks concerned with the Indian state's oft-quoted 'distance' from its diaspora after 1947 and instead examines the everyday diplomacy through which the Indian state governed the migration of Indians and sought to mediate their 'integration' into British society.[5] The profiles of elite, upper caste Indian diplomats who occupied a liminal status – exemplifying the best of Indian society and an almost reassuringly familiar link to Britishness – were in marked contrast to the unskilled lower class and caste Indians whose identity was still limited to their 'village-kin' group in India, reiterating them as so foreign that British officials quipped they 'may as well be creatures from another planet.'[6] Indeed an elite caste and class profile seemed necessary not just to signify an ideal Indian citizen, but very much also to delineate the kind of Indian who was most likely to deserve the British subject status bestowed on them as per the British Nationality Act of 1948.

Finally, the apparent 'domesticity' of issues of immigrant housing, sanitation and hygiene has left them seemingly outside the purview of diplomatic histories. This chapter instead recognises the everyday nature of diplomacy and situates it in particular 'local' immigrant geographies that stretch beyond the overwhelming focus on the metropoles of London and New Delhi. By locating immigrant localities in Birmingham as 'out of place' sites of diplomatic engagement, it challenges dominant accounts of diplomacy as the high politics of embassies, consulates, and conferences centred on the metropoles of London and New Delhi.

DIPLOMACY AND THE UNSKILLED INDIAN

A range of sociological accounts, newspaper reports, British official discourse, Indian diplomatic memoirs and correspondence are united in the view that the 'problem began

[4] Rashmi Desai, *Indian Immigrants in Britain*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 76

[5] Important accounts on the Indian state's relationship with its overseas communities after 1947 include Itty Abraham, *How India Became Territorial: Foreign Policy, Diaspora, Geopolitics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014) and Latha Varadarajan, *The Domestic Abroad: Diasporas in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[6] Note in file signed 'K B. P.', 21.4.64, HO 344/194, '"Indian Immigrants in Britain" by Rashmi Desai', The National Archives at Kew (TNA hereafter)

with' the entry of unskilled Indian immigrants.[7] In one of the most influential early studies of the Indian immigrant population in Britain, Rashmi Desai defined only the unskilled labourers as 'immigrants'. His argument for excluding other Indians such as 'students, qualified medical practitioners who come for further study' from the classification of 'immigrants' was not just the fact that they were less likely to permanently reside in Britain, but very much also the idea that only the 'unskilled' Indians formed 'a relatively closed social system, not unlike the one found in the villages of India and to some extent based on the same principles.'[8] Thus unlike their more elite counterparts who showed an ability to integrate in British society, these unskilled labourers were regarded as only concerned with replicating their village lifestyles in Britain. Notwithstanding the fact that all Indians were British subjects at the time, it is also striking that the title of 'immigrant' with its pejorative connotations was bestowed not just by the British but very much also by elite Indians.

These unskilled immigrants were also pitted against an idealized representation of early migrants as those, in the words of former Indian High Commissioner to the U.K Vijayalakshmi Pandit, 'who had reached the top of their various professions … mostly medical men and some lawyers'.[9] Pandit's narrative of the early Indian migrants in Britain had little space for the ayahs, lascars and pedlars, but was focused more on the lives of elite luminaries ranging from Cornelia Sorabji, Dadabhai Naoroji, Sophia Duleep Singh, to the longstanding tradition of British-educated Indians joining the Indian Civil Service and leading the nationalist movement.[10] Indeed, the list of Indians educated in Britain is in many ways 'a roll call of an Indian elite', with the very fact of being 'England-returned' also carrying significant prestige.[11] The intertwining of class, caste and race shaped British understandings of the 'social rank' of Indians in imperial Britain, enabling upper caste

[7] Vijayalakshmi Pandit, *The Scope of Happiness: A Personal Memoir* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1979), 292. See also Desai, *Indian Immigrants in Britain* and Y. D. Gundevia, *Outside the Archives*, (Hyderabad: Sangam Books, 2012 online edition), Chapter 8, Kindle.

[8] Desai, *Indian Immigrants in Britain*, 12-13

[9] Pandit, *The Scope of Happiness*, 292-293

[10] See Rozina Visram, *Ayahs, lascars, and princes : Indians in Britain, 1700-1947* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), Sumita Mukherjee, 'Herabai Tata and Sophia Duleep Singh: Suffragette Resistances for India and Britain 1910-1920,' in *South Asian Resistances in Britain, 1858-1947*, eds, Rehana Ahmed and Sumita Mukherjee, (London: Continuum, 2012), 106-121, Antoinette Burton, *At the Heart of the Empire: Indians and the colonial encounter in late-Victorian Britain*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), Sukanya Banerjee, *Becoming Imperial Citizens: Indians in the Late-Victorian Empire*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

[11] See Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars, Princes* and Sumita Mukherjee, *Nationalism, Education and Migrant Identities: The England-returned*, (London: Routledge, 2010)

and wealthy Indians to distinguish themselves from lascars and working class Indians.[12] In contrast to the elite, 'better class of Indians' who had gained access to 'polite' British society, the new Indian immigrant was viewed as rural, uncultured, unhygienic, problematic and unlikely to assimilate.[13] This shaped increasing calls for the Indian High Commission to intervene and mediate their entry into British life.

The potential (or lack thereof) of the new Indian immigrants to integrate into British society was the subject of much concern for Indian diplomats who received frequent complaints and requests from local British officials to intervene. For these diplomats, the discourse on assimilation was a larger narrative about the Indian capacity for modernity, brought into question by this 'unsuitable' class of immigrants. Indian diplomats served as a patronizing, parental authority of sorts, chiding errant immigrants and teaching them the ways of fitting into British society. Indeed as Y. D. Gundevia, the Indian Deputy High Commissioner in Britain in 1955, pointed out, 'All they (local British officials) wanted me to do was to come as often as I could, or send my officers out from London to teach them how to live.'[14] The engagement between Indian diplomats and these recent migrants drew on vocabularies of caste and class to define these immigrants as embarrassing reminders of the 'unskilled' lot of India – the lowest rung of caste society – which they could not entirely afford to distance themselves from. Indeed, these immigrants were viewed by local British officials as at least in part the responsibility of Indian High Commission officials, evident from the fact that a visit by High Commissioners to meet immigrants was soon a regular part of the diplomatic calendar, with invites sent by Mayors and immigrant organizations.

This was particularly the case for growing Indian immigrant localities in Birmingham that functioned as diplomatic sites, forged by and facilitating everyday Indian diplomacy. This is a reading of Indian diplomacy in terms of its engagement with the 'local', 'peripheral' spaces outside London and the unlikely 'domestic' context of immigrant housing and sanitation. Indeed while some creative accounts of postcolonial diplomacy have focused on international conferences – Commonwealth conferences, the Bandung Afro-Asian conference, and other Heads of Govt meetings – as 'geopolitical events' and sites where 'people, institutions and states negotiated, performed and experienced becoming

---

12 A. Martin Wainwright, *The Better Class of Indians: Social rank, imperial identity and South Asians in Britain, 1858-1914,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008)

13 See Wainwright, *The Better Class of Indians,* 9

14 Gundevia, *Outside the Archives,* chap. 8.

postcolonial', they continue to focus on the most formal, official sites of high politics.[15] To understand the transformation of a 'social place into a diplomatic site' and diplomacy itself as an everyday 'aspect of, even a function of, social life' necessitates going beyond the typical:

> Government offices and negotiation tables are typical diplomatic sites. These are the places where we expect the activities of politics and diplomacy to 'take place'. When it happens elsewhere it may strike us as 'out of place'.[16]

Birmingham was such an 'out of place' diplomatic site, facilitating everyday diplomacy that was not limited to the occasional visits of High Commissioners and other officials, but involved the creation of a local diplomatic apparatus including the nomination of Welfare Officers to coordinate with immigrants on the ground. Indeed as Dr Dhani Prem, an early Indian migrant and political activist recalled in his memoir: the Welfare Officer appointed by the High Commission came 'to Birmingham once a week … We called on civic heads, town clerks, medical officers of health and other officers in Smethwick, West Bromwich, Bilston and Wolverhampton and helped them in dealing with matters affecting immigrants.'[17] Attending a conference organized by Dr Prem in October 1955 to inaugurate a Welfare Council for Indian immigrants in the West Midlands, Gundevia announced plans to open a consulate in Birmingham, the first such Indian diplomatic establishment outside London.[18]As a local newspaper earnestly noted, 'it was hoped that the consulate would be able to give valuable help to local authorities in tackling problems created by the presence of the Indians.'[19] This had been the persistent view of local officials who had met Gundevia and other High Commission officials on an earlier visit: as the deputy Mayor explained, 'we both agreed that such an appointment (of an official representative) would be most advantageous particularly to those Indians in Birmingham who cannot speak English and who feel that they have no

---

[15] Ruth Craggs, 'Postcolonial geographies, decolonization and the performance of geopolitics at Commonwealth Conferences,' *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 35, no. 1 (2014), 39–55. See also Naoko Shimazu, 'Diplomacy as theatre: staging the Bandung Conference of 1955,' *Modern Asian Studies,* 48, no. 1 (2014), 225-252 and Ruth Craggs, 'Hospitality in geopolitics and the making of Commonwealth international relations,' *Geoforum*, 52 (2014), 90-100.

[16] Iver Neumann, *Diplomatic Sites: A Critical Enquiry* (New York : Columbia University Press, 2013), 21 and 23-24.

[17] Dhani R. Prem, *The Parliamentary Leper: A History of Colour Prejudice in Britain* (Aligarh: Metric Publications, 1965), 17

[18] 'Welfare Council for Indians in Midlands', *Birmingham Daily Post*, October 31, 1955. See also Prem, *The Parliamentary Leper*, 19-35.

[19] 'Welfare Council for Indians in Midlands,' *Birmingham Daily Post*, October 31, 1955

one to help them.'[20]

Much of the help provided by the Indian consulate dealt with the everyday aspects of immigrant life ranging from housing, language assistance, to the development of cultural forums for interaction. As M. L. Trivedi, the newly appointed Commissioner in Birmingham noted during the inauguration of the consulate in March 1958, the primary concern of Indian officials was to help immigrants find accommodation.[21] The issue of housing had by then become the quintessential representation of the 'problem' of coloured immigration in general and that of Indian immigrants in particular. Given that many lived in old houses modified as lodging quarters to accommodate a number of immigrants, a bevy of charges of unscrupulous coloured landlords, overcrowding, and filth identified the immigrant 'home' as a key impediment to assimilation and the breeding ground of health hazards. As a 1957 police report noted, the purchase of old homes by coloured people was a major source of conflict, given the 'viciousness of some coloured landlords who go to great lengths to evict their white tenants.'[22] Newspapers too reported rumours that 12,000 immigrants would be eligible for houses in Birmingham in the place of others who had long waited.[23] Summarizing the general state of immigrant housing, the police report went on to note that these houses were 'overcrowded, dirty and poorly furnished and the districts in which they are situated are deteriorating into near slums.'[24]

The British official construction of the unskilled immigrant as a public health problem facilitated two intertwined processes. First, the delineation of the 'immigrant problem' as a 'domestic', 'social' issue of hygiene rather than a 'political' one created an arena where Indian diplomats felt more comfortable interacting with immigrants without overarching concerns of infringing upon internal political debates. In so doing, it necessitated everyday Indian diplomacy – evident from the regular interactions between Indian diplomats and local officials responsible for housing and sanitation. Second, hygiene as a category of understanding these 'unskilled immigrants' enabled the concealment of not just race, but caste. Indian discourses of unsanitary immigrants are imbued with

[20] 'India may appoint a consul in Birmingham,' *Birmingham Daily Post*, August 16, 1955

[21] 'Mrs Pandit Opens Consular Office,' *Birmingham Daily Post*, March 1, 1958

[22] Note titled 'Immigration of coloured British subjects from other Commonwealth Countries: Information supplied by the Police in March 1957', HO 344/122, 'March 1957 review: reports from Chief Constables', TNA.

[23] 'Birmingham Acts on Immigration', *Birmingham Daily Post*, December 7, 1960

[24] Note titled 'Immigration of coloured British subjects from other Commonwealth Countries: Information supplied by the Police in March 1957', HO 344/122, TNA.

euphemisms of caste, providing a space to challenge the dominant tendency of Indian diplomatic histories to relegate caste as a domestic issue situated within the Indian nation-state and rendered invisible abroad.

PUBLIC HEALTH AND THE 'TWILIGHT ZONES' OF BIRMINGHAM

The situation in Birmingham exemplified narratives of public health paranoia about the 'twilight zones' in the city, 'areas that … are approaching, but have not yet reached, the night of slumdom.'[25] Ostensibly referring to old, crumbling houses ill-equipped for usage, the vividly graphic phrase came to represent 'an area of multi-occupation and an area of (coloured) immigration' that many white residents frequently sought to escape.[26] In the imaginative words of one angry letter written to the editor of the *Birmingham Daily Post* in 1961, the 'invasion' of coloured immigrants left many nervous and unsure of purchasing a house 'in case the twilight zone swamps us.'[27]

These immigrant 'twilight zones' were a subject of much sociological exploration and research at the time. As Jordanna Bailkin has powerfully demonstrated, the 'intellectual opportunity' of the postwar period meant that experts were key to the British state's conception of the migrant and ways of thinking about 'race relations.'[28] Perhaps the most influential study of the 'housing classes' of Sparkbrook in Birmingham was John Rex and Robert Moore's book '*Race, Community and Conflict'*, commissioned by the Institute for Race Relations. The book received wide news coverage and popular attention for being what E. J. B. Rose, Director of the Institute termed 'the first sociological study of a twilight zone in Britain.'[29] Recollecting the launch of the book at a luncheon at the Café Royal in 1967, Moore noted the 'unusual' nature of the high profile launch where Rose had 'used his wide contacts in the publishing world to ensure that publication was a high-profile event at a high status location.'[30] Indeed, speaking to reporters, Rose declared that 'this project in Birmingham has been our happiest commission.'[31] At the book launch, Moore and Rex spoke in great detail about the fact that Sparkbrook, right 'here' in

---

[25] John Rex and Robert Moore, *Race, Community, and Conflict: A Study of Sparkbrook,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 29.

[26] Rex and Moore, *Race, Community, and Conflict*, 31.

[27] Letter from 'Bewildered' titled 'Twilight Zones,' *Birmingham Daily Post*, April 13, 1961

[28] Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012), 9.

[29] 'Twilight in Sparkbrook', *Birmingham Daily Post,* January 24, 1967

[30] Robert Moore, 2011, 'Forty Four Years of Debate: The Impact of Race, Community and Conflict,' *Sociological Research Online* , 16, no. 3, 1 – 8.

[31] 'Twilight in Sparkbrook', *Birmingham Daily Post*, January 24, 1967

Britain, had proven to be a most 'exciting and rather terrifying' place for sociological study and fieldwork. Indeed, the houses of the 'twilight zone' of Sparkbrook included not just the immigrants, but the most underprivileged of society 'for whom the welfare state fails to provide'. For Moore and Rex, this was therefore a 'totally different world': 'to go into these houses, as we did, was like going into a cave. To go through these doors was to enter a different kind of life.'[32] The houses of Sparkbrook seemed to provide all the intellectual excitement of multiple, colonial geographies of research:

> In a house of this sort you might find in one room a Glasgow girl with an illegitimate baby: in another, a couple of young Irish labourers: in another, a group of Pakistanis drinking tea– all these different kinds of people living in one house. The Stratford Road – a road leading to that most English of places – seemed a mixture of Bombay, Dublin and St Kitt's.[33]

While the colonial origins and uses of sociology are well documented, the postcolonial continuities of this discipline 'deployed in the service of Empire's end' are well worth paying more attention to.[34] Alarmed by the utilization of their book's arguments about coloured immigrants vis-à-vis Birmingham's housing crisis to call for immigration control, Rex and Moore in a later preface sought to go beyond their focus on 'urban sociology' to instead stress the larger colonial context within which housing discrimination affected immigrants:

> This wider sociopolitical context was that of the relationship between the former colonial territories and the metropolitan countries and the working class. Thus although this is a study of the effect on race relations of urban social processes, ultimately the overall pattern of race relations cannot be understood solely as an urban problem. This is a current American way of avoiding facing up to the race war and the Third World Revolution. We do not wish our work to be quoted in support of that kind of position.[35]

---

[32] 'Twilight in Sparkbrook,' *Birmingham Daily Post,* January 24, 1967

[33] 'Twilight in Sparkbrook,' *Birmingham Daily Post*, January 24, 1967

[34] Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire*, 9. See also George Steinmetz, ed, *Sociology and Empire: The Imperial Entanglements of a Discipline*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013) and Stephen Steinberg, 'Two children of empire: Michael Banton and John Rex,' *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 38, no. 8 (2015): 1382-1388.

[35] Rex and Moore, *Race, Community and Conflict*, xiv. Rex stresses elsewhere that 'the structures of patterns of social relations, or norms and beliefs by 'housing class' is one and only one part of the total explanation of racial conflict' in another article'. See John Rex, 'The Concept of Housing Class and the Sociology of Race Relations,' Race & Class, 12, no. 3, (1971), 293 - 301

While Rex and Moore's work was no doubt the most high profile of sociological studies about housing in Birmingham, 'investigations' into the 'living conditions' and houses of coloured immigrants were increasingly commonplace in Birmingham. Dhani Prem in his memoir recounts the 'surveys' of at least two Birmingham councilors, one of whom 'went on a peeping tour of Balsall Heath and accused all coloured people of drug-addiction', while the other 'initiated a one-man investigation' into the excesses of coloured landlords.[36] As Prem perceptively noted:

> They all say they are doing this in the interest of the coloured people themselves and that they do not believe in racial discrimination. They never make such investigations into the living conditions of, say, the Irishman or the English themselves, as if Birmingham had no slums, no drug addicts, no overcrowding before the coloured immigrants arrived here.[37]

The fear of the dark, amorphous, creeping immigrant twilight zones indeed provided an opportunity to talk about race by other means: as one member of the Birmingham city council noted, 'We are entitled to expect immigrants to recognize our standards and our conditions, wherever they may come from. This is not a question of colour or creed.'[38] Thus questions of hygiene, sanitation and housing became central avenues to define the 'immigrant problem' wherein officials could deny racial motives even as they studied every aspect of immigrant houses as an indication of a national/racial tendency to live in unsanitary conditions. Indeed, even as a 1957 police report noted the improvements in housing in Birmingham, it argued that 'by English standards however there are still cases of desperate overcrowding, squalor and hardship.'[39] The report alleged that immigrants deliberately chose to live in such conditions even when they earned good money, since they preferred 'to live in communities … in overcrowded conditions rather than be separated from their old associations.'[40] Such a delineation of the seemingly inherent tendency of immigrants to live in squalor with their fellow nationals also marked out some immigrants more than others as especially – almost naturally – prone to dirt and

---

[36] Prem, *The Parliamentary Leper*, 11

[37] Prem, *The Parliamentary Leper*, 10

[38] 'Birmingham Acts on Immigration,' *Birmingham Daily Post,* December 7, 1960

[39] Note titled 'Immigration of coloured British subjects from other Commonwealth Countries: Information supplied by the Police in March 1957', HO 344/122, TNA.

[40] Note titled 'Immigration of coloured British subjects from other Commonwealth Countries: Information supplied by the Police in March 1957', HO 344/122, TNA.

filth. Indeed, as the report concluded, 'in general the living conditions and standards of cleanliness of the West Indians are better than the Indians and Pakistanis.'[41]

DIRT, HYGIENE AND THE INTERSECTIONS OF CASTE AND CLASS

Indian diplomatic anxieties over unclean immigrants who soiled the prestige of the Indian state by reiterating colonial stereotypes of India as a land of filth can only be understood through the undergirding structures of caste. Indeed, the intersections of caste, class and race are integral to understanding Indian views of those regarded as 'unskilled' and the concurrent vocabularies of dirt and hygiene that inform their existence as a threat to public health. Perhaps the most influential colonial narrative of India's 'social' filth and backwardness as informed by Hindu practices and in no way related to the political realities of British rule was Katherine Mayo's *Mother India* (1927), a book that Gandhi famously called 'a drain inspector's report'. Not only was Mayo's book considerably spurred by the fearful prospect of increasing Indian immigration to America, its primary concern had been 'the public health risk that the unsanitary practices in India posed to the rest of the world community.'[42] As Mayo argued:

> In estimating the safety of the United States from infection, the element of 'carriers' must be considered. Each epidemic produces a crop of 'carriers' whose power to spread the disease lasts from one hundred and one days to permanency … And India is scarcely a month removed from New York or San Francisco. "Whenever India's real condition becomes known," said an American Public Health expert now in international service, "all the civilized countries of the world will turn to the League of Nations and demand protection against her."[43]

.

In Mayo's reading, India was *itself* a public health hazard 'that should elicit more fear than sympathy', a 'world menace' and contagion infecting foreign nations through infectious immigrant bodies.[44] The unsanitary state of Indians had not just been the concern of colonial narratives but a longstanding interest of Gandhi whose experiences in South Africa informed the centrality of caste-based ideas of hygiene and health to his politics.

---

[41] Note titled 'Immigration of coloured British subjects from other Commonwealth Countries: Information supplied by the Police in March 1957', HO 344/122, TNA.

[42] Mrinalini Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 80

[43] Katherine Mayo, *Mother India* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co, 1927) http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks03/0300811h.html

[44] See Asha Nadkarni, '"World-Menace": National Reproduction and Public Health in Katherine Mayo's Mother India,' *American Quarterly*, 60, no. 3, (2008): 806

Sanitation was thus innately political and 'central to Gandhi's ideas of an enlightened community'.[45] He was intimately aware of the burden of hygiene through which Indians were racialised as undeserving of equality:

> Ever since my settlement in Natal, I had been endeavoring to clear the community of a charge that had been levelled against it, not without a certain amount of truth. The charge had often been made that the Indian was slovenly in his habits and did not keep his house and surroundings clean.[46]

Much of this debate on the hygiene of overseas Indians centred on those regarded as the 'sweepings of the bazaar': the indentured coolies, who were held responsible for the strict sanitation codes and laws imposed on all Indians in South Africa.[47] Passenger Indians too were 'collapsed' into the category of the coolie wherein 'the question of filth and squalor in the colony became a "coolie problem"'.[48] Indeed, even as Gandhi acknowledged 'with great mortification' the general complaint of unhygienic practices among Indians, he argued that most Indians' 'personal habits, it would appear, are not dirty, except in the case of indentured Indians, who are too poor to attend to personal cleanliness.'[49] While some of the innovative scholarship on the sociocultural meanings of 'public health' in India and its diaspora does mention the role of caste in shaping such ideas, they do not sufficiently stress its centrality in the construction of untouchability as a form of hygiene. Caste is pervasive in its encoding as a 'natural and social order where people, place, occupation, and knowledge are characterized by pollution and ritual cleanliness.'[50] The caste system thus structured hierarchies of cleanliness and created a 'social immunity system' that protects its followers as a 'health measure,'[51] while fixing 'dirt and filth (as) an existential companion of Dalits … Dalits become dirt and dirt is them.'[52] In its sanitary guise, caste was not just rendered hygienic but even scientific and modern.

---

45 Srirupa Prasad, *Cultural Politics of Hygiene in India, 1890–1940: Contagions of Feeling*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 48.

46 Prasad, *Cultural Politics of Hygiene*, 48.

47 Bhiku Parekh quotes this phrase. See Bhikhu Parekh, 'Some reflections on the Hindu diaspora,' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 20, no. 4, (1994), 607.

48 Banerjee, *Becoming Imperial Citizens*, 82.

49 Banerjee, *Becoming Imperial Citizens,* 104

50 Mukul Sharma, *Caste and Nature: Dalits and Indian Environmental Politics*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017) accessed via Oxford Scholarship Online.

51 John Mattausch, 'Gandhi's Prescription: Health and Hygiene in the Unfinished Struggle for Swaraj,' *South Asia Research,* 34, no. 2, (2014), 156.

52 Gopal Guru quoted in Sharma, *Caste and Nature*.

Indeed, as M. S. S. Pandian has perceptively noted, those that went beyond the circumscribing of caste to the social realm were met with a modernising rhetoric that sought to 'inscribe the language of caste (in the political realm) as once again illegitimate.'[53] As we will see, these attempts to encode caste as hygiene while not once naming 'caste', had significant continuities in the discourse of Indian diplomats for whom uncultured, unhygienic, unskilled immigrants were a 'problem' better relegated to the Indian domestic realm, rather than the embarrassment of mediating their international presence. The words of B. R. Ambedkar are instructive for understanding the figure of the 'unskilled immigrant' in elite Indian eyes:

> The majority of the Hindus, however, believe that you are dirty, you are polluted … In such a state of inequality and injustice, some Hindus try to soothe the Untouchables. They say, 'Get educated yourselves, be clean, and then we will touch you, we will treat you on par.' In fact, we all know by experience that the condition of an educated, moneyed, and clean Mahar is as bad as that of an uneducated, poor, and dirty one … if one is not respected because he is uneducated, poor, and not a well-dressed person, what should a common Mahar do? How can he secure equality, who cannot gain education, achieve property, or dress highly?[54]

These vocabularies of caste and class permeated the Indian diplomatic response to frequent complaints from local British officials about the widespread, almost inherent, tendency of Indians for unsanitary, overcrowded living. Indian diplomats visiting immigrant localities were forced to come face to face with the unhygienic and dirty conditions in which Indian immigrants resided. Visiting Coventry and West Bromwich in 1955, Gundevia noted that this was a 'dreadful eye opener' not just in terms of what he regarded as the problematic internal dynamics of the Indian community in Britain, but very much also the stark reality of these immigrant 'hovels':

> A string of well-to-do Indians all over England from London to Birmingham had cornered all available residential accommodation in every industrial town. Every three-roomed house had been 'furnished' with 12 or 16 beds, and this was said to

[53] M. S. S. Pandian, 'One step outside modernity: Caste, identity politics and public sphere.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37, no. 18, (2002), 1737.

[54] B. R. Ambedkar, 'What Path to Salvation?', Speech delivered to the Bombay Presidency Mahar Conference, 31st May 1936, Bombay. Translated from the Marathi by Vasant W. Moon. http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/txt_ambedkar_salvation.html

> provide 'ample accommodation' for 24 or 32 Indian unskilled workmen, half of them working eight hours a day in a factory and sleeping in a bed provided for them by night … With 24 men sleeping in 3 or 4 rooms, sanitation in most of these houses was a thorough mess.[55]

Apart from Mayors and Councillors, the local officials interacting with Gundevia almost always included Health officers, sanitation inspectors and police.[56] According to these officials, the Indians were not in any way a criminal element – they were largely regarded as docile and hardworking, although their lack of familiarity with English and their unhygienic lifestyles were regarded as a considerable problem. Much to his surprise, Gundevia noted that UK officials did not favour his suggestion that such unskilled Indian immigration be stopped, at the very least until 'better housing and sanitation facilities be provided in many of these towns.'[57] Instead, they reiterated that they were in grave need of labour and did not deem the Indian unskilled migrant problematic enough to ban his entry. As Gundevia recalled in his memoir, 'the consensus at the end of every discussion was that they wanted the "docile" Indian, the "hard-working" Indian, sanitation or no sanitation.'[58] This did not seem like much of a solution to Gundevia who was quite clear that the solution to this embarrassing diplomatic problem of the unsanitary lower class and caste unskilled Indian remained in preventing his entry into Britain. He compiled a report on the unsanitary living conditions of Indians that made for 'nasty reading' and found unanimous support from Nehru who, having read the 'dreadful report', agreed to restrict the entry of migrants who had not passed a matriculation exam and did not know English.[59]

As we have seen in Chapter 4, the Indian suggestion that Britain refuse entry to those Indians whose passports were not endorsed as valid for the UK did not find much favour with the British who argued that the status of Indians as Commonwealth citizens enabled their free entry into Britain. As B. F. M. Samuel of the Home Office noted, 'the fact that a passport is not endorsed as valid for entry into the UK does not in itself

---

[55] Gundevia, *Outside the Archives*, chap. 8.
[56] 'India may appoint a consul in Birmingham', Birmingham Daily Post, 16 August 1955. Also see Gundevia, *Outside the Archives*, chap. 8.
[57] Gundevia, *Outside the Archives*, chap. 8.
[58] Gundevia, *Outside the Archives*, chap. 8.
[59] Gundevia, *Outside the Archives*, chap. 8.

render the document unsatisfactory as evidence of identity and nationality.'[60] For Gundevia, however, this had little to do with Commonwealth solidarity and more to do with the need for unskilled labour at any cost: 'they (the British) would do everything possible to encourage this unfortunate migration from India, Pakistan and the Caribbean Islands. I gave it up.'[61] These were to him, quite simply, undesirable classes of migrants not deserving of entry into a Western country. Indeed in his memoir, he points to the inevitability of race riots in a country that had not paid heed to India's warnings about the problems that came with such clearly unsuitable immigrants:

> The first race riots in London, not very long after I had left in 1956, were not over Indians. They were directed against Jamaicans. Enoch Powell woke up to it long after. If Britain had been faced with some problems in the years that followed, there is only one thing certain, and that is that India is not to blame – and the Indian in the UK is not to blame either.[62]

In this rather unnerving reading, the 'problems' faced by Britain were less a result of racial discrimination and more about the behaviour and tendency of these categories of immigrants – almost inevitably – to lead to such crises. Gundevia was not the only one to draw such conclusions. In her memoir, former High Commissioner in London Vijayalakshmi Pandit notes how the 'unfamiliarity' of lower class/caste 'unskilled' Indians with British ways created 'many difficulties for India House and were the early beginnings of the ugly situation that *later led to discrimination* and race riots.'[63] Pandit too argues that the inherent inability of unskilled Indians to relate to Britishness was both embarrassing for Indian diplomacy and *created* discrimination to some degree. Pandit's account of the history of Indian immigration to Britain makes this clear: the first Indian migrants to Britain were 'highly respected and happily settled', in stark contrast to the unskilled immigrants that followed. These men 'obviously … were confronted with a very different culture and standards of living and all the difficulties that arose out of this encounter.'[64]

The status of these 'unskilled' Indians as unsuitable representatives of Indianness was not

---

[60] Letter from B. F. M. Samuel to A. H. G. Pope, 21.3.61, HO 344/152, 'Suggestion to refuse leave to land to Indians with passports not valid for UK', TNA

[61] Gundevia, *Outside the Archives,* chap. 8.

[62] Gundevia, *Outside the Archives*, chap. 8.

[63] Pandit, *Scope of Happiness*, 293. Italics added.

[64] Pandit, *Scope of Happiness*, 292-293.

just in variance with the early influx of Indian immigrants, it was the very opposite of the ideal narrative of Indiannness exemplified by Indian diplomats themselves. These elite, Anglicised, upper class and caste citizens were the most eligible, dignified interlocutors of Indianness to local British officials and were thereby – often reluctantly – tasked with mediating the behaviour of their more undesirable, lower class and caste counterparts in the international realm.

CASTE, CLASS, AND THE INDIAN DIPLOMAT AS EXEMPLAR

> The Shaheb's wardrobe was divided into sets of hangers, each with its own label: Calcutta zamindar, Indian diplomat, English gentleman, would-be Nehru, South Club tennis player, Non-Aligned Statesman, and so on.[65]

In Amitav Ghosh's delightful narrative, the rank of the Indian diplomat – one imbued with the registers of class and caste – was an aspirational social status, replete with its own sartorial and cultural marks of distinction. Histories and popular accounts of the Indian foreign service are replete with the standard narrative of Nehru's 'hand-picked' diplomats who were typically Oxbridge-educated, elite, upper caste and class individuals, even royalty, charged with performing as exemplars of Indianness in the international realm. They were thus 'positioned socially, culturally and intellectually at the crossover from India to the (Western) world' and were agents of modernity who sought to 'extricate themselves from their society to become modern'.[66] The Indian Foreign Service was the most prestigious service in Nehruvian India, and its members the most desirable: their very ability to bridge the national and the international, and in so doing produce new narratives of Indianness, was much acclaimed. As Khushwant Singh – himself a former diplomat – quipped in a short story: 'a bachelor in the foreign service abroad was worth two in the IAS (Indian Administrative Service) in India.'[67]

If the Indian Foreign Service performed as modern, cultured, desirable Indians, much respected in the international realm, they did so as much through registers of caste as class. Archival documents and memoirs of these Indian diplomats offer arenas to

---

[65]Amitav Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, (Ravi Dayal Publisher & Penguin Books, 2009), 38

[66] Kate Sullivan, 'Exceptionalism in Indian Diplomacy: The Origins of India's Moral Leadership Aspirations,' *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 37, no. 4 (2014): 651 and Deep K. Datta Ray, *The Making of Indian Diplomacy: A critique of Eurocentrism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). Chapter 2, accessed via Oxford Scholarship Online.

[67] Singh, *Collected Stories*, 236.

uncover these vocabularies of caste and class in other words. Indeed, these euphemisms of caste are omnipresent in the vocabulary of diplomats who describe some of their fellow citizens as 'not the best type', 'dirty', 'unclean' and 'undesirable'. These are words tied intimately to the affective structures of 'untouchability' as a form of 'hygiene': to stay 'clean' and not be 'polluted' by a certain category of people.[68] While scholars have skillfully examined the elite class profiles of these early diplomats, their focus on caste is relatively limited.[69] This is so despite the facts laid out by the Ministry of External Affairs' Report of the Committee on the Indian Foreign Service which found that until 1961, there were only two Scheduled Caste candidates and one Scheduled Tribe candidate in their ranks. By extension, as Kate Sullivan notes, it 'is almost certain that many, if not the majority, of early elite officers were upper-caste Brahmans.' It is telling that this clear reference to the word 'caste', in an otherwise perceptive essay, finds mention only in the footnote.[70]

Yet, as I shall show, the upper caste profile of Indian diplomats facilitated both their elite status in the Western societies they served in and reinforced the stark difference between the ideal narrative of Indianness produced by them and the 'embarrassing' narrative put forth by the presence and behaviour of lower caste and class 'unskilled' Indians that they had to engage with. Moreover, such elite profiles also shaped the oft-noted 'moralising' tone of Indian diplomats and leaders who perceived themselves as a 'superior mix of East and West'.[71] This is best explained in the words of Carlos Romulo, the Philippines representative at the Bandung conference, who pointed out that 'affectations of cultural superiority induced by a conscious identification with an ancient civilization' have 'come to be the hallmark of Indian representatives.'[72]The Indonesian diplomat Dr Roeslan Abdulgani too similarly attributed the 'arrogance' of these elite Indians to 'the fact that they had thoroughly mastered the English language, and had very much experience in negotiations with the British.'[73]

---

[68] Purvi Mehta, 'Recasting Caste: Histories of Dalit Transnationalism and the Internationalization of Caste Discrimination' (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 2013)

[69] Some exceptions include Andrew J. Rotter, *Comrades at Odds: The United States and India, 1947–1964* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), Vineet Thakur, *Postscripts on Independence: Foreign Policy Ideas, Identity, and Institutions in India and South Africa* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018) and Datta Ray, *The Making of Indian Diplomacy*.

[70] Sullivan, 'Exceptionalism in Indian Diplomacy,' 649.

[71] Sullivan, 'Exceptionalism in Indian Diplomacy,' 648.

[72] Quoted in Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Legacies of Bandung: decolonisation and the politics of culture,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40, no. 46, (2005): 4813.

[73] Chakrabarty, 'Legacies of Bandung', 4813.

The fact that Indian diplomats belonged predominantly to upper castes played a significant role in mediating their identity in the international stage – their claim to elite status as independent India's first diplomats was bolstered not just by their Western education and Anglicised reputation, but also by the fact that their upper caste status reiterated their dominant 'social rank' within India.[74] These diplomats could then be read as sufficiently Western enough to merit familiarity, and sufficiently elite enough within their own society to authoritatively represent India. Indeed these two aspects went hand in hand, reassuring Western observers that they would be dealing with the most elite Indians, trained to match Western standards of cultural and diplomatic behaviour. A 1941 Paramount news video featuring the arrival of Sir Girija Shankar Bajpai in New York as India's first Agent General in the United States, exemplifies these interpretations of the status of Indian diplomats through their caste ranking. After showing visuals of Bajpai and his family arriving in New York, the video focuses on his two daughters who pose for the camera – wearing sarees and eminently photogenic, one of them wears a nosering and the other a bindi. The voiceover's reading of this symbolism is telling: 'the new minister's daughters show the nose diamond and the forehead caste mark of high rank.'[75]

Such narratives of caste as respectable social status were all the more pronounced in Britain, where these markers were seen as going hand in hand with the British-educated and Anglicised status of these diplomats. Vijayalakshmi Pandit was a 'diplomatic celebrity' of sorts long before her stint as India's High Commissioner in London: her charismatic performance of gendered, 'modern', Indianness perhaps even more popular than her accomplishments as a diplomat. As Julie Laut has argued, Pandit's elite, very British upbringing effectively trained her to act as the exemplification 'of the "educated, 'modern,' new woman" early twentieth-century Indian nationalism desired.'[76] Pandit thus represented the virtues of caste as social rank and, in so doing, the hybridity of upper caste Indians as the best Western-educated, elite representatives of India. Indeed, Laut quotes one admirer's assessment of Pandit as reflecting the 'best in the two ways of life – the Eastern and the Western … Her exterior beams with the manners and etiquette of…

[74] I draw on the work of Martin Wainwright to make this argument. See Wainwright, *The Better Class of Indians,* 126.

[75] 'India Sends Sir Girija Shankar Bajpai As Representative', 31 October 1941, Grinberg, Paramount, Pathe Newsreels, Sherman Grinberg Library. Available at https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/video/indian-diplomatic-envoy-sir-girija-shankar-bajpai-arrives-news-footage/502472479

[76] Julie Laut, 'India at the United Nations: A Postcolonial Nation-State on the Global Stage, 1945-1955' (PhD dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2016), 26.

her European governess — but her heart throbs with the Kashmiri Brahmin blood of her ancestor(s).'[77]

Similar extrapolations permeate British press reports too. Paying tribute to her term as High Commissioner in an article titled 'Mrs Pandit: Portrait of a Great Indian', the *Birmingham Daily Post* noted how her 'great challenge … in Britain has been the persistence of old images of British India. They have now dispersed before her as a living image of a new India, existing on its own resources, spiritual as well as personal.'[78] Yet the report was eager to focus on her life in British India and British upbringing, a narrative reiterated by the upper caste status of her family:

> Her family were Kashmiri Brahmins of Allahabad, aristocrats in the sensitive caste structure of Hindu society. Her father Motilal Nehru was a lawyer who led a highly Westernised way of life, on good terms with the British. His son went to Harrow and Cambridge, his daughters were taught at home by a private tutor. As a girl she was called 'Swarup' – 'beautiful face' – but in the family circle she had an English nickname, 'Nan'.[79]

These vocabularies of comforting familiarity are reinforced by Pandit's 'aristocratic' Brahmin status – an elite, upper caste Indian was no doubt more likely to be considered proximate to Britishness. While Pandit was no doubt the exemplar of these narratives, especially as they pertained to caste, breathless profiles of her successor Mohammed Ali Currim Chagla too reinforced his familiar, elite, British-educated status. *The Times* pointed out how Chagla was *returning* to Britain, 'restoring links that he has always cherished since his days at Lincoln College, Oxford', and excitedly noted his prowess as a 'first class bridge player.'[80] In addition to his English education, the profile reiterated Chagla's adherence to what were long regarded as familiar, Western values:

> 'Liberal' and 'civilized' are the words that recur in all estimates, whether they come from close friends or acquaintances; in the difficult task of succeeding Mrs Pandit, Mr Chagla has all the qualities needed.[81]

---

[77] Laut, 'India at the United Nations,' 26.
[78] 'Mrs Pandit: Portrait of a Great Indian', *Birmingham Daily Post*, August 14, 1961
[79] 'Mrs Pandit: Portrait of a Great Indian', *Birmingham Daily Post*, August 14, 1961
[80] 'Liberal Indian as Envoy in London', *Times*, April 6, 1962
[81] 'Liberal Indian as Envoy in London', *Times,* April 6, 1962

Such narratives positioned Indian diplomats both as ideal representatives of India and as most suited to British sensibilities – this was, of course, very much in contrast to the class and caste background of 'unskilled Indians' regarded as embarrassing representatives of India and unsuited to British standards. Such diplomats were exemplars of Indian citizenship, models of culture and modernity that unskilled Indian immigrants could only aspire to. They embodied the ideal Indian authorized to represent the Indian nation in the international realm: some other unsuitable Indians in Britain, as Pandit once remarked, were playing 'fast and loose with India's prestige'.[82] In her memoir, Pandit recounts how these 'unskilled' immigrants 'economized to the greatest possible degree, sometimes several people sharing a room and cooking on a tiny gas ring, in a near-slum area that soon became worse.'[83] Her visit to some areas in Manchester and Liverpool seemed to confirm the worst complaints received by the High Commission:

> I saw a number of dwellings occupied by Indian immigrants and was distressed beyond words – and also fearful of future consequences. The Indians and Pakistanis were happy to see me as they were very lonely, and my coming brought memories of home. I spoke to them about the necessity of learning the language, the need for cleanliness, and the attempt they must make to fit into foreign ways.[84]

Indian diplomats viewed the question of integration and assimilation into British society as the most important question for Indian immigrants, their ability to fit into British standards somehow reflective of India's stature and reputation. Frequently reiterating the importance of 'achieving integration, the most difficult art in the world', M. C. Chagla applauded 'sympathetic'[85], 'cosmopolitan'[86] local governments and urged immigrants to 'mix with British people and try to understand them and be understood'.[87] As he remarked to the Indian community during a visit in 1963, 'he had been told how well-behaved were Indians in Coventry, but that was not enough'.[88] The Welfare Officers appointed by the High Commission were directly tasked with ensuring the assimilation of these Indians: apart from helping with accommodation issues, they

[82] V L Pandit papers (II Instalment), File no 17(ii), Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi (NMML hereafter)
[83] Pandit, *Scope of Happiness*, 292
[84] Pandit, *Scope of Happiness*, 293
[85] 'Indians told to mix with British', *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, February 26, 1963
[86] 'B'ham is setting good example on integration', *Birmingham Mail*, February 27,1963,
[87] 'Indians told to mix with British', *Coventry Evening Telegraph,* February 26, 1963
[88] 'Indians told to mix with British', *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, February 26, 1963

facilitated the participation of Indian immigrants in English language classes, often checking in on their continual involvement.[89]

Some of these diplomats also expressed significant curiosity about interracial marriage, sometimes viewing the desirability of Indian men for white British women as a gendered metaphor of the larger question of India's place in the new world order. For High Commissioner B. G. Kher, interracial marriages between Indian men and white British women were indicative of India's growing stature:

> India is now occupying a free status and many women are proud to call themselves Indian, although in upper circles colour prejudice is still traceable though carefully concealed. As our nation becomes more and more powerful and prosperous (and as there is a surplus of women here over men) many women will marry Indians. I believe Indians will also prefer fairer wives.[90]

As Kher's comment about the Indian preference for 'fairer wives' indicates, interracial marriage was a discourse on the intersection of race, caste and class in defining the desirability of Indian men. Indeed, it would seem that Indian men of a certain social standing were rather more desirable than their lower class and caste counterparts, a scenario where miscegenation was seen as a sign of assimilation. As Pandit pointed out in her memoir, several 'highly respected' elite Indian men settled in Britain had 'married English women': a fact seen as reflective of their cultured nature and ability to 'integrate into British society'.[91] This was in stark contrast to their lower caste and class counterparts who did not speak 'English to begin with and were slow to learn and therefore to integrate themselves with those among whom they now lived'.[92] Thus interracial marriage was a sign of being a more cultured and desirable Indian who was both an easily assimilable British subject and a worthy representative of the Indian nation. As a British official reflecting on the lack of assimilation of the undesirable class of Indians pointed out:

---

[89] 'Teaching the People from Overseas', *Birmingham Daily Post,* October 19, 1956. Manek Vajifdar, a former India League member, served as a Liaison Officer to Indian immigrants in this period. Letter from Birmingham Chief Constable's Office to J. M. Ross, 27.2.57, HO 344/122, TNA.

[90] Letter fro B. G. Kher to Morarji Desai, 26.10. 52, B.G Kher papers (I instalment), Subject file no 29 (Part III), NMML

[91] Pandit, *Scope of Happiness*, 292

[92] Pandit, *Scope of Happiness*, 293

> In the very early days of coloured immigration, the alarmists were prone to talk about the dangers of miscegenation, that is a development which has not occurred … in some ways, the outlook would be less disturbing if it had.[93]

Perhaps most interestingly, integration was not solely a discourse on the capability of unskilled Indians to live up to a seemingly greater standard of culture, sanitation and modernity. Rather, their place in Britain and their likelihood of assimilating into British society was often a larger statement on India's place in the Commonwealth and a racialised international order. Visiting the Indian community in Manchester, Chagla declared 'his belief in integration', adding that 'the future of the world depended on the integration of races … the Commonwealth was the best example of integration'.[94] Local officials too stressed the bonds of the Commonwealth: in the words of the Deputy Mayor of Birmingham, 'our aim is to be a family and for that reason we want Commonwealth members to feel at home here.'[95]

Indian diplomats nevertheless had to manage a delicate balancing act: while they continued to receive complaints about the problems caused by immigrants and discussed these issues with the Mayors and local officials concerned, they reiterated the fact that these 'Indians' were more accurately soon to be 'Indian-origin' citizens whose presence was largely an 'internal' British matter. Indeed, when called upon to assist regarding a strike by members of the Transport and General Workers Union protesting against the appointment of an Indian bus conductor in West Bromwich, Gundevia noted that 'discreet enquiries' had shown that the conductor-in-question had acquired British nationality. The Indian High Commission had therefore decided to 'play it cool … I would go to Birmingham only after the strike had been settled.'[96] A more telling instance of the complexity of India's relationship with these immigrants is an event attended by High Commissioner Pandit where the Indian activist Dhani Prem condemned the fascist Oswald Mosley's plans to hold a rally in Birmingham. Pandit's response is striking, as a newspaper reported:

> Mrs Pandit … said she had been approached on the subject of racial discrimination in Birmingham but she had replied that she had not come to

[93] Note in file signed K.B.P, 21.4.64, HO 344/194, TNA
[94] Excerpt from a report in *The Statesman*, 16 Oct 1962
[95] 'Suggested Step to World Government', *Birmingham Daily Post*, January 26, 1959
[96] Gundevia, *Outside the Archives*, chap. 8.

> Birmingham to take up a matter which it was for the people of the city to look into themselves.[97]

Indeed, advocating a Gandhian response to racist attacks, Pandit went on to express the 'gratitude of the people of her country for the help and kindness shown to them'.[98] The Indian diplomatic unease to participate in what could be defined as an internal political situation demonstrates the precarity of their interactions with and on behalf of unskilled immigrants in Britain, even as they engaged with them on a regular basis in the 'domestic' realm of housing and sanitation.

POPULATION, BIRTH CONTROL AND THE PROBLEMS OF THE IMMIGRANT BODY

> An assurance that the Indian government was not seeking to solve its own population problems by encouraging mass emigration and that fears of a large-scale Asian invasion of Europe was groundless, was given by the Indian Deputy High Commissioner Mr Y. D. Gundevia[99]

The *Birmingham Daily Post's* lead story of October 1955, ostensibly about a conference to establish a Welfare Council for Indians, wasted no time in getting to what it viewed as the crux of the issue. The threat posed by the Indian immigrant was not just one of their presence in British society, but in terms of the larger question about what this presence portended: the looming danger of India's enormous population besieging Britain, coupled with the fact that these existing immigrants themselves had a propensity to overpopulate. India had long been the go-to example of the threat of overpopulation to public health worldwide, a theme that resonated to the extent that 'the phrase 'countries like India' became shorthand for poor countries with high fertility'.[100] These narratives had long shaped the backlash against Indian immigration. Indeed, as Matthew Connelly has skillfully argued:

> Whether they were called 'hordes' or 'coolies', both terms treated them as a population, rather than as individual people, a population that, by its very nature,

[97] 'Appeal to city coloured people at Mrs Pandit dinner', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 3 October 1956
[98] 'Appeal to city coloured people at Mrs Pandit dinner', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 3 October 1956
[99] 'Welfare Council for Indians in Midlands', *Birmingham Daily Post,* 31 October 1955
[100] Matthew Connelly, *Fatal Misconception: the struggle to control world population*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 11

was said to imperil a certain 'quality of life' – whether that quality was eugenic, economic or both at the same time.[101]

The menace of population had long been a concern of late nineteenth and twentieth century politics, shaping the wide acceptance of 'positive' eugenic measures to protect 'public health', accompanied by calls for birth control. Migration in particular was viewed as a problem of population control, with eugenic immigration laws in place to allow the entry of only those deemed 'fit', healthy and acceptable to populate the national demography.[102] India was integral to these debates: its identity and history of migration often defined in terms of its seemingly uncontrollable population. Indeed, the very construction of British India's 'population problem' by colonial public health officials went hand in hand with the *Mother India* narrative of India's unfettered, unsanitary 'overbreeding' wherein all of India's ills were charted to an inherent, cultural, Indian proclivity to overpopulation, while delinking it from the structures and policies of the colonial state.[103] This had considerable resonance in the narrative of the Indian immigrant as 'recklessly prolific in procreation' – as one eugenicist in Kenya noted – and thereby a threat to all the countries they sought to settle in.[104] As G. C. L. Bertram of the Eugenics Society of Britain argued, 'Without making any subjective judgements, it is a fact that in Fiji to-day, in the absence of significant aid of contraceptives, the Indian immigrants are outbreeding the indigenous people, and will soon be quite dominant in those islands.'[105]

Other observers perceived strategic motives in Indian immigration, with the South African Prime Minister D. F. Malan for instance arguing that Nehru 'wanted to off-load surplus Indian population on Africa' and in so doing, take over Africa.[106] Far from these

---

[101] Connelly, *Fatal misconception,* 35

[102] Alison Bashford's work on these themes is prolific. A few notable examples include Bashford 'Nation, empire, globe: the spaces of population debate in the interwar years,' *Comparative studies in society and history* 49, no. 1 (2007): 170-201, Bashford, *Imperial Hygiene: A Critical history of Colonialism, Nationalism, and Public Health* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), Bashford, *Global Population: History, Geopolitics, and Life on Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), Bashford and Philippa Levine, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)

[103] Rahul Nair, 'The construction of a 'population problem'in Colonial India 1919–1947,' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History,* 39, no. 2 (2011): 227-247.

[104] Chloe Campbell, *Race and Empire: Eugenics in Colonial Kenya* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 118

[105] G. C. L. Bertram, 'Eugenics in the age of crowding,' *Eugenics review,* 50, no. 1 (1958), 41.

[106] Extract from record of conversation of Secretary of State for Commonwealth relations with D. F. Malan, 31.5.53, DO 35/5306, 'Government of India's interest in UK policy towards Indians in colonial territories', TNA.

notions of emigration as a secretive plan for strategic dominance, Indian eugenicists like Sripati Chandrasekhar had long articulated rigorous birth control measures and 'planned international migration' from the overpopulated countries of Asia to the 'thinly populated countries such as Australia, Canada' as a solution to the problem of 'population pressure'. [107]

The unskilled Indian immigrant in Britain was viewed as embodying these wide-ranging concerns about India's population problems, further exemplifying their threat to 'public health'. Indeed, British conceptions of the Indian immigrant as a public health hazard went beyond the mere focus on their housing and living conditions. Longstanding racialised understandings of imperial hygiene and 'public health' where 'purity was the project of public health, as well as the project of nation' imagined the border as the front line of defence against contagions and 'foreign bodies' that sought to pollute the nation.[108] This preoccupation with the health of the immigrant body – both as unfit and prone to diseases in itself but also as a carrier of disease, importing germs and infecting the body politic – was a persistent narrative about the Indian immigrant. The overcrowded, poor state of houses in Birmingham, for instance, was viewed as the 'breeding ground' for a number of diseases ranging from tuberculosis, leprosy to venereal diseases that these immigrants seemed especially prone to. Grave anxieties abounded over the physically weak 'tuberculous' Indian and Pakistani immigrants who were 'unassimilable medically', causing a strain on medical services and infecting the body politic with disease. Such was the intensity of paranoid press coverage that the Indian High Commissioner contacted the Ministry of Health in 1955 regarding the situation, arguing that while these immigrants might be 'a susceptible lot', he did not think them 'a menace to the health of this country'.[109]

While the High Commissioner was assured that this was a more limited threat than news reporting might suggest, British officials sought to get the Indian and Pakistani governments on board to conduct medical tests on these immigrants before their entry into Britain. Unsurprisingly enough, the Indians were not enthusiastic about any such

[107] Sripati Chandrasekhar, *Hungry People and Empty Lands: An Essay on Population Problems and International Tensions* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1954). See also Chandrasekhar, 'Population Pressure in India,' *Pacific Affairs*, 16, no. 2 (1943), 166-184 and Chandrasekhar, 'The Emigration and Status of Indians in the British Empire,' *Social Forces*, 24, no. 2, (1945), 152-160.

[108] Bashford, *Imperial Hygiene*, 3.

[109] Roberta Bivins, *Contagious Communities: Medicine, Migration, and the NHS in Post War Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 63

process, agreeing only to advise medical exams for migrants while also reiterating that most Indian immigrants do not 'carry tuberculosis to that country.'[110] As Bivins has pointed out:

> The proposed scheme itself was also deeply flawed, as it was unlikely to cover 'the people who are the real problem … unskilled labourers and the like with a very low standard of living, who are presumably the people most likely to create health problems'.[111]

The increasing interpretation of the immigrant as a medical threat enabled more exacting criteria of 'hygienic citizenship'.[112] As one Member of Parliament pointed out in his four-pronged guidelines for eligible migrants: 'the immigrant should have a clean bill of health. He should have a job to come to, suitable accommodation should be available and he should have access to some system of language interpretation.'[113] The unhealthy immigrants were also considered a great strain to the 'costly enterprise' of the new health scheme: as one letter writer in Birmingham noted, 'Should we be glad that a shortage of hospital beds is our lot, while dark faces stud the wards in every hospital?'[114] One Birmingham Councillor argued:

> Only good coloured immigrants should be allowed to come here, good in morals and health, and they should be licensed so that their good behaviour and limitation is guaranteed.[115]

The body of the Indian immigrant was thus a subject of concern, variously viewed as diseased and problematic, prone to damaging public health and reflective of an apparent proclivity to procreate. In places like Sparkbrook, long viewed with great sociological curiosity given its increasing immigrant populations, Indian immigrants were regarded as carrying with them the inherent national tendency for overpopulation and were utilized as readily-available test subjects for research on contraceptives that could be utilized for populations in their home countries. Indian immigration to Britain until the 1970s had been largely male, with Indian women immigrants – almost always women seeking to

---

[110] Bivins, *Contagious Communities*, 101
[111] Bivins, *Contagious Communities*, 101
[112] Bivins, *Contagious Communities*, 9
[113] 'Mr. Hocking Has Immigrant And Welfare Talks', *Coventry Evening Telegraph* , October 2, 1961
[114] 'Twilight Zones', letter from 'Bewildered', *Birmingham Daily Post* , April 13, 1961
[115] Quoted in Rex and Moore, *Race, Community, and Conflict,* 19

join their husbands or fiancés in Britain – trickling in at a very slow rate. Evan Smith and Marinella Marmo note that 'over 23,400 Indian men migrated to Britain with work permits between 1962 and 1972, compared with just over 2600 Indian women.'[116] They convincingly argue that the utility of this female migrant in the eyes of the British state was to prevent miscegenation by 'controlling' the promiscuity of the South Asian male and acting as a 'civilising influence'.[117] In the 1970s, these female migrants seeking to enter Britain were deemed just as suspicious as their male counterparts by the British state which subjected their bodies to 'virginity testing' practices in order to ensure that the 'fast-track fianceé visa regimes' were not being misused by women – the assumption that the South Asian norm of a virginal fiancee would serve as proof of these migrants' fraudulent applications.[118]

While this timeframe is beyond my period of focus, I argue that the very arrival of these immigrant women as 'wives' into Britain rendered their bodies the subject of much scrutiny and concern, long before the invasive virginity testing abuses of the British immigration system. The presence of Indian and other immigrant women in Sparkbrook was key to the studies carried out in 1962 by researchers of the Birmingham Family Planning Association and Birmingham University to explore new forms of contraception vis-à-vis their 'suitability' for immigrant women. These studies were funded by research grants from the Eugenics Society and the Ford Foundation, which 'was contemplating spending large sums on enquiring into the control of fertility in underdeveloped countries, but wished to do this under cover of some English or European research organisations that had experience of investigating population control'.[119] Their research proposal to study the fertility of 'problem families' in Birmingham makes clear the overarching purposes of their investigation:

> In the vicinity of Birmingham, there is concentrated a larger group than anywhere else of immigrants representative of many of the countries most in need of population control. In addition, there are indigenous 'problem families' also for various reasons in need of contraceptive advice, but not likely to seek it

---

116 Evan Smith and Marinella Marmo, *Race, gender and the body in British immigration control: subject to examination* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 84

117 Smith and Marmo, *Race, Gender and the Body,* 84

118 Smith and Marmo, *Race, Gender and the Body,* 88

119 Letter from Philip Sargant Florence to Dr G. C. L. Bertram, 14.7.62, SA/EUG/C.404, Box 152, 'Dr J. A. H. Waterhouse', Wellcome Library (WL hereon)

for themselves.[120]

Researchers thus sought to test a range of contraceptive methods on these 'problem families' on a small scale, on the bodies of immigrant women, before they could be launched on a wider basis. Indeed, as Philip Florence, Vice President of Birmingham's Family Planning Association (FPA) pointed out, 'Some Pakistani and Indian wives don't easily accept the idea of the birth control pill. We believe the sex coil (the new method being trialled in Sparkbrook) could be the answer to this.'[121] While we have seen the great academic interest in the 'twilight zone' of Sparkbrook as a laboratory offering a variety of cultural and racial 'subjects', the sheer ambition of this trial in seeking to analyse the 'relative acceptability' of contraceptive methods was not merely about their status as immigrant 'problem families' but more so about their place as 'ethnic' subjects from overpopulated, underdeveloped countries that could benefit from population control.[122] This was a clear aim of the trial in seeking to provide 'results (that) could be applied in underdeveloped countries.'[123] Indeed, as the researchers argued, 'reactions among immigrants of differing origins should throw light also on the acceptability of alternative birth control methods in the underdeveloped countries, whose standard of living is pinned down by the present population explosion.'[124] Seeking to study 'objections to birth control based on religious or other grounds', researchers tested the seemingly deviant family planning preferences of coloured immigrants against 'English couples (who) will act as a 'control' against which our other findings can be checked'.[125] Moreover, they argued that the presence of both immigrants and 'indigenous problem families' in the trial had particular relevance for the 'welfare services in this country' exhausted by the burden of these categories of people. The plethora of explorative possibilities offered by these immigrants seemed dizzying to researchers who even argued that ongoing work elsewhere on birth control facilities for the 'mentally handicapped will be particularly applicable, not only among our own similar groups, but among those immigrant peoples whose knowledge of the English language is so poor

[120] Note titled 'Enquiry into Fertility of Problem Families in Birmigham', 14.7.62, SA/EUG/C.404, WL.
[121] Ray Hill, 'Now- Birth Control by the Sex Coil,' *Daily Mirror*, March 10, 1964
[122] See J. A. H. Waterhouse and Diana Brabban, 'Inquiry into the Fertility of Immigrants,' *International Migration Digest,* 1, no. 2 (1964): 152-166 and J. A. H. Waterhouse, 'The Relative Acceptability of Contraceptive Methods Among Immigrants,' in *Biological Aspects of Social Problems*, eds, J. E. Meade and A. S. Parkes (Edinburgh and London: Oliver & Boyd, 1965)
[123] 'Birmingham Birth control tests', *Birmingham Times*, March 9, 1964
[124] Ron Mount, 'Young marrieds to take test', *Birmingham Times*, March 15, 1964
[125] Ron Mount, 'Young marrieds to take test', *Birmingham Times*, March 15, 1964

that their position is closely equivalent.'[126] Researchers employed a Pakistani psychiatrist Dr Farrukh Hashmi to act as an interlocutor and translator given his 'knowledge of Pakistani and Indian languages and his ready acceptance among these people.'[127]

The funding of the Ford Foundation was supplanted by the financial support of the Eugenics society – of which the lead researcher J. A. H. Waterhouse was a member – which decided to grant funds, apparently satisfied by the goals of the project to 'select samples stratified by ethnic, economic and family size groups'.[128] While the Birmingham trial focused on Irish, West Indian, Indian and Pakistani families in Sparkbrook, there was considerable interest in the Indian and Pakistani women as representative of 'countries most in need of population control'.[129] Indeed Waterhouse excitedly noted that there was great scope for research and 'both the Pakistani and Indian High Commissioners are very much interested in this kind of study and are very keen to see the results.'[130] Newspapers also reported that the eventual aim of the trial was that 'immigrant nurses and doctors will be trained so that they can teach the various methods in their own countries.'[131]

India's growing focus on providing birth control facilities to curb overpopulation considerably explains Indian diplomatic interest in a trial where unskilled Indian immigrants were seemingly acceptable subjects for a test case on contraceptive methods. A significant literature has shown the ways in which international networks of family planning activists and eugenicists facilitated the work of Indian pioneers of birth control: predominantly elite upper caste men and women, whose attempts to tackle India's overpopulation problem were largely directed towards controlling the fertility of lower class/caste and Muslim Indians who they viewed as most prone to having large families and therefore most in need of contraception.[132] The widely perceived inability and disinterest of such marginalized communities in utilising methods of birth control was articulated as proof of their lack of modernity, thereby impeding national progress. In

126 Note titled 'Enquiry into Fertility of Problem Families in Birmigham', 14.7.62, SA/EUG/C.404, WL.
127 Letter from J. A. H. Waterhouse to G. C. L. Bertram, 19.12.62, SA/EUG/C.404, WL.
128 Letter from G. C. L. Bertram to Julian Huxley, 18.7.62, SA/EUG/C.404, WL. Underlined in the original.
129 Note titled 'Enquiry into Fertility of Problem Families in Birmigham', 14.7.62, SA/EUG/C.404, WL.
130 Letter from J. A. H. Waterhouse to G. C. L. Bertram, 19.12.62, SA/EUG/C.404, WL.
131 'New birth control method', *Birmingham Daily Post*, March 10, 1964
132 Important examples include Sanjam Ahluwalia, *Reproductive Restraints: Birth Control in India, 1877-1947*, (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), Sarah Hodges, *Contraception, Colonialism and Commerce: Birth Control in South India, 1920–1940.* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate Publishing Company. 2008) and Connelly, *Fatal Misconception.*

their elite reading of India's 'population problem', these masses were deemed 'irrational subjects incapable of making informed contraceptive decisions who could not be entrusted with regular and precise execution of birth control techniques' and for whom a 'one time contraceptive procedure' such as sterilization was better suited.[133]

Local family planning organisations in Birmingham too were cognizant of the international contexts of population control: as the annual reports of the Birmingham Family Planning Association (FPA) from the mid 1950s indicate, this was an organization intimately aware of not just the larger international concerns regarding the 'global problem' of overpopulation that informed their practice, but also of the potential international relevance of their own work with multiracial immigrant patients.[134] Thus the Birmingham FPA paid host to doctors and family planning specialists from foreign countries who sought to observe the work of the clinic, and even announced an annual prize for research on 'the control of conception' that would 'bring to our knowledge research of a similar nature throughout the world.'[135]

The increasing number of 'coloured patients' – documented by the annual reports that frequently highlighted the stories of women from Jamaica and India who 'showed more than the usual gratitude' for the help they received – did not just shape the Birmingham FPA' s perception of its international significance but was also central to the task of helping control the fertility of immigrants who were the subjects of contraceptive trials initiated by the FPA.[136]These immigrants were representative of the population problems of their home countries of the 'third world' and therefore even more threatening to the body politic of Britain. While, as Smith and Marmo have argued, the presence of these immigrant women in Britain had been required to prevent the growth of a mixed race population, I have shown that it was just as necessary to ensure that these women did not perpetuate what was regarded as the Indian tendency for large families.[137] These contraceptive tests reiterated the precarious status of these unskilled immigrants and

---

[133] Sanjam Ahluwalia and Daksha Parmar, 'From Gandhi to Gandhi Contraceptive Technologies and Sexual Politics in Postcolonial India, 1947–1977' in *Reproductive states: global perspectives on the invention and implementation of population policy,* eds, Rickie Solinger and Mie Nakachi (Oxford and New York : Oxford University Press, 2016)

[134] Annual reports of the Birmingham Family Planning Association, MS1571/14/1–34, Library of Birmingham archives (LB hereafter)

[135] 1957 Annual report of the Birmingham Family Planning Association, MS 1571/14/1–34, LB. One of these visitors was Avabai B Wadia, secretary of the Indian Family Planning Association who spoke of the 'Population problems of India' at a talk given at the Birmingham University staff club in 1957.

[136] See annual reports of the Birmingham Family Planning Association, MS 1571/14/1–34, LB.

[137] Smith and Marmo, *Race, Gender and the Body,* 85

Indian immigrant women as marginalized 'problem families' in Britain, while their lower caste and class status – regarded therefore as automatically implying a lack of knowledge of contraceptive techniques – made their utilisation as subjects for scientific trials acceptable for Indian diplomats.

CONCLUSION

> Some said: "I had a thousand *bighas* of land, and people called us *Sardar*." [Chief]
>
> Some said: "There, we were warriors. No one stood against us."
>
> …
>
> Some said: "We were the district scribes, we oversaw everything."
>
> Some said "I was the police superintendent, I swaggered and ordered everyone about."
>
> Some said: "I was a village accountant there – getting sugar cane and rice free."
>
> As one, they were all in England and were just fools who were full of pride.[138]

In his poignant poem about his 'passage to England' in the 1950s, Madho Ram Mahimi paints an evocative portrayal of the lives of 'unskilled' Indians: painful hours of work in the factories at day, followed by long evenings in the pub reminiscing about the homes they left behind. As Clair Wills points out, this 'shared drinking culture was the public face of the overcrowded bachelor houses in which many migrants lived'.[139] These immigrant localities were unlikely yet important sites of diplomatic engagement where elite, Anglicised, upper caste and class Indian diplomats – exemplifying both the ideal Indian in the international realm and, in so doing, the hybrid, Western-educated Indian most proximate to Britishness – were charged with teaching the lower class and caste 'unsuitable', un-assimilable Indians 'how to live'. Declared as a public health threat in

[138] Madho Ram's poem translated and quoted in Clair Wills, 'Passage to England', The Times Literary Supplement, 30 August 2017 https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/punjabi-immigrants-stories/

[139] Wills, 'Passage to England'.

Britain, the 'unsanitary' lives of these 'unskilled' Indians were mediated by Indian diplomats through the euphemisms and vocabularies of caste and class as hygiene.

The slow arrival of Indian women as fiancees and wives of the men already resident in Britain created a new dynamic where Indian immigrants were known not just as a 'public health threat', but as 'problem families' that could potentially replicate the overpopulation of their country in Britain. Indeed, the population concerns unleashed by the increasing presence of Indian women is perhaps best exemplified by Dr Prem's remarkable call for the sterilization of Indian immigrant women with large families. While he later clarified that he had merely recommended providing the option of sterilization to Indian immigrant women who would prefer it,[140] newspapers nevertheless reported his call for sterilization as the 'only way to prevent some British towns from being swamped by a soaring coloured population'.[141] Noting that attempts to 'get immigrant wives to utilize birth control methods, including the pill' had not been a success, Prem's solution drew on the fact that sterilization was common practice in India for lower caste and class individuals who were seemingly incapable of learning more complex means of contraception.[142]

While these unskilled immigrants carried with them the burdens of dirt, squalor and 'overbreeding' synonymous with India in the Western imagination, embarrassed Indian diplomats sought to enable them to assimilate into British society and in so doing represent a more modern, cultured narrative of Indianness. Tracing these diplomatic discourses about the intimate registers of sanitation and hygiene in a 'tertiary' diplomatic space like Birmingham has provided a different reading of everyday diplomacy – one that makes evident the registers of caste and class that defined Indian perceptions of the international realm and those best suited to traversing it. Through its focus on everyday diplomacy vis-à-vis 'integrating' new Indian migrants into British society, this chapter has also reiterated the need to complicate narratives of the Indian state's 'distance' from the diaspora.

[140] '"No campaign to sterilize"', *Evening Express*, 26 January 1965
[141] 'Sterilization urged for immigrant wives', *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 24 January 1965
[142] Sterilization urged for immigrant wives', *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 24 January 1965

CONCLUSION

In January 2018, the Government of India announced plans to issue a new category of orange-coloured passports for 'unskilled' Indians who had limited educational qualifications and required emigration clearance while traveling to a group of 18 countries, predominantly in West Asia. This would differentiate them from 'other' Indians who would continue to have the traditional navy blue passport. The idea was shelved almost immediately, following a backlash that such a plan would only create 'second class citizens'.[1] In Jiby J. Kattakayam's words:

> I can already see the looks of disdain for the orange passport holders in a highly class/caste conscious society like ours … A pristine Blue to breeze through the West and a dirty orange to crawl through West Asian immigration counters?[2]

Such a scheme to colour-code Indian migrants merely reflects the Indian state's longstanding view of the international as a space for narrating Indianness – a task for which upper caste and class Indians traversing the hallowed geographies of the West were deemed best suited. In the introduction to his profoundly moving and masterful *Passport Photos*, Amitava Kumar describes his book as a 'forged passport … (an) act of fabrication against the language of government agencies'. In so doing, Kumar prompts us to read the passport in terms of the stories, emotions and experiences it renders invisible.[3] Lost within the pages of the postcolonial Indian passport are the histories and afterlives of Empire and indenture that shaped the Indian state's very idea of 'the international'. Simmering beneath the surface of the proposed orange passport are stories of 'unsuitable' lower caste and class applicants who were denied passports for decades, and the experiences of 'unskilled' migrants like Isher Dass Bhagat – whom we encountered in the introduction – who had to resort to forged passports in order to bypass the state's rejection of their mobility. Indeed the terminologies of 'unskilled', 'pedlar class', 'unsuitable' Indians carry with them the histories of the 'coolie' and make evident the intersections of caste and class in Indian diplomatic discourse. The well-

[1] I have written about this elsewhere. See Kalathmika Natarajan, 'Caste, class and the history of the Indian passport.' *South Asia @ LSE*, 28 March 2018 https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2018/03/28/caste-class-and-the-history-of-the-indian-passport/

[2] Jiby J Kattakayam, 'We do not need the orange colour passports', *Times of India*, 15 January 2018 https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/jibber-jabber/we-do-not-need-the-orange-colour-passports-period/

[3] Amitava Kumar, *Passport Photos* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000)

known 2001 Report of the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora appointed by the Indian government is an archive of such narratives; while attempting to articulate a triumphant discourse on a united 'Indian diaspora', it nevertheless demonstrates an unease with the inconvenient histories and demographics of the 'old' indentured labour diaspora and the newer 'unskilled' labour migrants to the Gulf. In a list of recommendations 'to ensure that Diaspora members feel welcomed on their arrival' in India, the report called on immigration and customs officials at airports to adopt a more considered, friendly approach:

> There have been many incidents of rough handling of Indians coming from African countries or the Gulf region. *Many of them are not as well-heeled and sophisticated in appearance as their Western counterparts.* They usually take much longer to clear landing formalities. Many of these NRIs (Non Resident Indians) are illiterate, nervous and often unable to respond adequately to the queries of the immigration/customs officials. Our officials should be trained to deal with such NRIs with understanding and courtesy.[4]

The image of the naïve, uncultured, uneducated NRI resident in less developed regions of the world was thus in marked contrast to the stature and even 'appearance' of the elite, 'skilled' Indians resident in the West. These Indians had succeeded in remaking the image of India, even as 'India's emergence as a modern society, destined to play a role in knowledge-based industries … has helped to change the image of the Indian Diaspora globally.'[5] This was a mutually-constitutive process wherein India's economic and technological prowess also ensured that Indians abroad were no longer seen 'as an economically disadvantaged, silent minority' in their countries of residence.[6] The much-touted achievements of elite Indians in the West were a deeply cathartic experience for the postcolonial nation-state. This is most clearly evident in the report's assessment of the Indian diaspora in Britain, where it proclaimed that the script of India's international reputation – forever intertwined with the status of its overseas Indians – had been rewritten:

---

[4] 'The Indian Diaspora', Report of the High Level Committee on Indian Diaspora (New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs, 2001), 394. Italics added.
https://web.archive.org/web/20020815030030/http://indiandiaspora.nic.in:80/contents.htm

[5] 'The Indian Diaspora', vii

[6] 'The Indian Diaspora', vii

> Far from being stereotyped as a land of snake charmers, saints and fakirs, India now appears to the Western world as a computer-savvy, intelligent and dynamic nation. A century ago, India was the land from where Western countries would get factory workers and farm labourers.[7]

The afterlives of indenture permeate this discourse. Indeed, listing a group of successful Indian businessmen in Britain, the report notes that this was a 'continuously growing list of what is jokingly called the *"coolie millionaires."*[8] While the provenance of the term is unclear, this remarkable turn of phrase – twinning two seemingly paradoxical words – only serves to reiterate the significance of indenture: as a constitutive element of Indian identity in the international realm and, therefore, a narrative that required to be transcended by the Indian state with the help of these elite, 'skilled' Indians who were more likely to be remembered by the millionaire tag than the coolie one. Indeed if the elite, upper caste, technologically skilled NRI resident in the West is now produced as an exemplar of Indian identity, the '"true" postcolonial, reassuring the West and reassuring to the resident Indians', this is an identity shaped very much as a repudiation of the Indianness of the coolie and his modern day legatees – the 'unskilled' labourers.[9] The afterlives of indenture qua caste endure to this day.

***

This thesis has examined the entanglements of British-Indian diplomatic relations as a means of tracing the central figure of the migrant and the afterlives of Empire and indenture in Indian diplomatic history. This is a history that intertwines the stories of migrants traveling across the *kaala paani* to colonies like Fiji, British Guiana, Mauritius in the late nineteenth century with the experiences of migrants seeking to travel to Britain in the 1950s. British-Indian diplomacy after empire stretched well beyond the metropoles of London and New Delhi in seeking to negotiate the often precarious citizenship claims of overseas Indians. This was a diplomatic realm shaped by the histories of indenture and the provisions of the 1948 British Nationality Act (BNA), producing Indians as entangled citizens whose status often remained precarious.

---

[7] 'The Indian Diaspora', 128

[8] 'The Indian Diaspora', 128. Italics added.

[9] Himadeep Muppidi, *Politics of the Global* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 56. For an excellent exploration of the 'technocultural Hindu nationalism' facilitated by these narratives of the 'NRI', see Rohit Chopra, *Technology and Nationalism in India: Cultural Negotiations from Colonialism to Cyberspace* (New York: Cambria Press, 2008)

At a time when overseas Indian communities faced crises of citizenship in their countries of residence, India sought to utilise the rubric of the Commonwealth to engage with the status of its overseas Indians, a vast majority of whom were resident in British colonial territories and Commonwealth nations. Articulating its membership of the Commonwealth through terms of 'reciprocity of citizenship', India sought to ensure the 'un-foreignness' of its overseas communities. The status of overseas Indians also shaped the making of the Indian Citizenship Act and served as the basis for India's claims to diplomatic representation in colonial territories. One of the main objectives of this thesis has therefore been to complicate a pervasive assumption about the Indian state's relationship with the diaspora as defined by the moment of independence that apparently served also as a moment of abandonment. Independence has been described as an 'overnight' shift when the Indian state 'deliberately turned its back' on its overseas communities in 1947.[10] Indeed, Marie Carine-Lall goes to the extent of noting that 'Mother India has pushed its diaspora away since independence.'[11] Yet this thesis has pointed to the complex and continual scale of the Indian state's *engagement* with overseas Indians. A focus on the BNA and its recognition of Indians as British subjects after 1947 enables an understanding of the Indian state's dynamic vis-à-vis overseas Indians that is more cognizant of the entanglements of Empire and afterlives of indenture. Even with all the severe limitations of performing postcolonial diplomacy, it is nevertheless clear that the Indian state engaged with the status of overseas Indians, particularly those in the colonies, and often made continual representations to British officials on their behalf. Contrary to accounts of the Indian state's decision to join the Commonwealth that rely solely on geopolitical explanations, I have instead shown India's belief that the Commonwealth provided a space within which the rights and status of overseas Indians could be negotiated. This is most evident in Indian diplomacy's clever utilization of the oft-repeated narrative of the 'Commonwealth family': within the 'family', India could bring up issues concerning overseas Indians in a way that British officials would otherwise deem unthinkable.

---

[10] Itty Abraham, *How India Became Territorial: Foreign Policy, Diaspora, Geopolitics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 70 and Latha Varadarajan, *The Domestic Abroad: Diasporas in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 52.

[11] Marie Carine-Lall, 'Mother India's Forgotten Children' in *International Migration and Sending Countries: Perceptions, Policies and Transnational Relations*, ed, Eva Ostergaard-Nielsen, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 122

This is not to claim that the Indian state regarded overseas Indians necessarily as 'their responsibility' in the narrow sense of the term: it is, however, to reiterate that the state sought to ensure the citizenship rights of Indians, not necessarily *Indian* citizenship. Indeed, provisions for citizenship by registration were provided to overseas Indians, though it was widely held that the protections offered by the Indian state would be far weaker than the citizenship rights afforded by the countries of residence. Moreover, by viewing the postcolonial Indian state's relationship with long-settled overseas Indians as closely tied to its regulation of the mobility of prospective migrants, this thesis has reiterated the need to go beyond binaries of the Indian state's inclusion/exclusion of the diaspora. Instead, it has interrogated the centrality of the migrant and the very act of migration to the making and performance of Indian diplomacy: intertwining migrations past and present. Indeed the Indian state's call for the citizenship rights and equality of overseas Indians went hand in hand with the control of any further emigration of 'unskilled' migrants – successors of the coolie who were likely to cause more problems for the Indian state. Such a perspective also enables a closer look at the Indian state's diverse engagement with Indian migrants – ranging from regional passport offices to the immigrant localities of Birmingham. Postcolonial Indian migration to Britain in the period of my study largely involved the migration of men, followed by the increasing arrivals of women especially from the late 1960s and 70s. While I have pointed to the discourse around Indian immigrant women in Chapter 5, there is much scope to interrogate the gendered dimensions of these evolving narratives and the Indian state's role in mediating these new migrations.[12]

Weaving together diverse stories ranging from the experiences of former indentured labourers and descendants from British Guiana 'returning' to India on the M.V Resurgent in 1955 to the status of Indian 'unskilled' migrants deemed a 'public health' threat in Britain, this thesis has sought to put people back into the study of Indian diplomatic history. In so doing, it has made visible the underlying narratives of caste and class that have shaped Indian diplomatic discourse and ideas of the 'international'. This is essential historical context to the recent work of anti-caste activists in the Indian diaspora who have stressed that 'wherever the diaspora go, they take their caste with them, and so

[12] Evan Smith and Marinella Marmo have done important work in this regard, focusing particularly on the virginity testing controversy of the 1970s, but these larger themes remain untapped. See Evan Smith and Marinella Marmo, *Race, gender and the body in British immigration control: subject to examination* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)

… discrimination goes with them.'[13] Indeed, as we have seen, the very claim to migrate – especially to the West – had long been governed by dynamics of caste and class.

The neglect of indenture in much of the literature on Indian diplomacy has resulted in an often-narrow frame of reference largely focused on the 'great powers' or India's immediate neighbourhood, particularly through securitized narratives. Drawing on the vast scholarship on indentured labour migration and the entanglements of Empire that shaped histories and discourses of indenture, this thesis has articulated a reading of Indian diplomatic history that is deeply cognizant of the foundational structures of caste and class and the importance of regions long deemed peripheral. The lives of migrants in colonial territories and Commonwealth nations were thus structured by the afterlives of indenture and the negotiation of imperial identities. Centering the diverse histories and geographies of Indian migration, from Ceylon and Burma to British Guiana, Fiji and Britain, thus enables a nuanced reading of postcolonial diplomacy. As the diplomat Y. D. Gundevia wrote in his memoir in 1984:

> I had seen no sculptures in black marble in Burma. I saw none in Durban or Cape Town when I went there in 1950, and none in the beautiful tea gardens of Sri Lanka in later years, and I am told there are none in Fiji, nor anywhere across the great continent of Africa and all the way to the West Indies – no monoliths to the black Indian Labourer that helped to enrich the Empire, with the sweat of his brow… Indeed, it would be true to say that the sun never set on the persons of Indian origin all over the world.[14]

This is a reading of the 'international' as a realm produced by the labour and status of Indian indentured and 'unskilled' migrants, a reworking of that quintessential imperial saying to convey instead the vast diplomatic space and stature provided by the presence of overseas Indians, particularly across Commonwealth nations and British colonies. Indeed, it is striking that the 2001 Report of the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora borrows much of this phrasing to proclaim a dominant international profile for India: 'the Indian Diaspora spans the globe and stretches across all the oceans and

[13] See reports published by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in 2014. Research Reports 91 and 92, 'Caste in Britain'. https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/research-report-91-caste-in-britain-socio-legal-review.pdf and https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/research-report-92-caste-in-britain-experts-seminar-and-stakeholders-workshop.pdf

[14] Y. D. Gundevia, *Outside the Archives* (Hyderabad: Sangam Books, 2012 online edition), Chapter 4, Kindle.

continents. It is so widespread that the sun never sets on the Indian Diaspora.'[15] Recovering the figure of the migrant is thus integral to understanding the very making and practice of Indian diplomacy after Empire.

[15] 'The Indian Diaspora', v

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Archives

The National Archives at Kew

HO 344	Home Office - Commonwealth Immigration Files
HO 213	Home Office: Aliens Department: General (GEN) Files and Aliens' Naturalization and Nationality (ALN and NTY Symbol Series) Files
DO 35	Dominions Office and Commonwealth Relations Office: Original Correspondence
DO 133	Commonwealth Relations Office and successors: High Commission and Consular Archives, India: Registered Files
DO 142	Commonwealth Relations Office: India: Registered Files
CO 537	Colonial Office and predecessors: Confidential General and Confidential Original Correspondence
CO 936	Colonial Office and Commonwealth Office: International and General Department and predecessors: Original Correspondence
FO 371	Foreign Office: Political Departments: General Correspondence from 1906-1966
AST 7	Unemployment Assistance Board and successors: Administration of Assistance Schemes, Registered Files

Wellcome Library

SAEUG Eugenics Society Archive

British Library, India Office Records

Public & Judicial Department, IOR/L/PJ

Wolfson Centre, Library of Birmingham

MS 1571, Papers of Professor Philip Sargant Florence and his wife Lella Secor Florence

The National Archives of India

Ministry of External Affairs:

- UK branch files
- PV(I) Section files
- Indian Citizenship (IC) Section files

Nehru Memorial Museum and Library

Private papers:

- Jawaharlal Nehru (Post-1947 papers marked S.G., made available to researchers from 2016)
- B. G. Kher
- Vijayalakshmi Pandit

- M. C. Chagla
- Lord Mountbatten
- B. N. Rau

Autobiographies and Memoirs

Bissoondoyal, Basdeo. *Life in Greater India: An Autobiography*. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan,1984.

Gandhi, Mohandas K. *An Autobiography or the Story of my Experiments with Truth*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1926.

Gundevia, Y. D., *Outside the Archives*. Hyderabad: Sangam Books, 2012 (Online edition)

Nehru, Jawaharlal. *The Discovery of India*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2008.

Pandit, Vijaya Lakshmi. *The Scope of Happiness: A Personal Memoir*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1979

Pawar, Ishwar Das. *My Struggle in Life*. New York: Page Publishing, 2015.

Prem, Dhani R. *The Parliamentary Leper: A History of Colour Prejudice in Britain*. Aligarh: Metric Publications, 1965.

Collected Speeches and Writings

Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru, First and Second Series, Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, New Delhi

Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Navajivan Trust, Ahmedabad.

Speeches and Writings of Lord Sinha: With a Portrait and a Sketch. G.A. Natesan & Co, Madras, 1919.

Speeches and Writings of the Rt. Hon V. S. Srinivasa Sastri. G.A Natesan & Co, Madras, 1924.

India's Constitution in the Making (Collected works of B. N. Rau), ed, B. Shiva Rao, Allied Publishers, Bombay, 1960.

Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Dr. Ambedkar Foundation, New Delhi, 2014

Reports and Compilations

Conference of Prime Ministers and Representatives of the United Kingdom, The Dominions, and India Held in June, July, and August, 1921: Summary of Proceedings and Documents, H. M. Stationery Office, London, 1921

Asian Relations: Being a report of the proceedings and documentation of the First Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, March–April 1947, Asian Relations Organisation, New Delhi, 1948

Andrews, Charles Freer, and Walter Washington Pearson. Report on indentured labour in Fiji: An independent enquiry, Calcutta: Star Printing Works, 1916.

A Collection of the Acts of the Indian Legislature and of the Governor General for the year 1922, Superintendent Government Printing, Calcutta, 1923.

Annual reports of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. Available online at https://mealib.nic.in/?2386?000

Report of the High Level Committee on Indian Diaspora, 'The Indian Diaspora', Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, 2001

Debates

Debates of the Constituent Assembly of India. Available online at http://cadindia.clpr.org.in/constitution_assembly_debates

British Parliamentary Proceedings, Hansard.

Books

Abraham, Itty. *How India became territorial: Foreign policy, diaspora, geopolitics*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014.

Ahluwalia, Sanjam. *Reproductive Restraints: Birth control in India, 1877-1947*. Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008.

Ahmed, Rehana, and Sumita Mukherjee, eds. *South Asian Resistances in Britain, 1858-1947*. London: Continuum, 2012.

Aiyar, Sana. *Indians in Kenya: The Politics of Diaspora,* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015.

Akenson, Donald Harman, and Amitava Chowdhury, eds. *Between Dispersion and Belonging: Global Approaches to Diaspora in Practice.* Kingston, Ontario: McGill-Queen's Press, 2016.

Amrith, Sunil S. *Crossing the Bay of Bengal: The Furies of Nature and the Fortunes of Migrants*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013.

Amrith, Sunil S. *Migration and diaspora in modern Asia.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Anievas, Alexander, Nivi Manchanda, and Robbie Shilliam, eds. *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line.* London and New York: Routledge, 2014.

Bahadur, Gaiutra. *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013

Bailkin, Jordanna. *Afterlife of Empire.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012.

Bald, Vivek. *Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian America.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013.

Ballard, Roger, ed. *Desh Pardesh: the South Asian Presence in Britain*. London: Hurst & Co, 1994.

Banerjee, Sukanya. *Becoming Imperial Citizens: Indians in the late-Victorian empire.* Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2010.

Bashford, Alison, and Philippa Levine, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Bashford, Alison. *Global Population: History, Geopolitics, and Life on Earth*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.

Bashford, Alison. *Imperial Hygiene: A Critical History of Colonialism, Nationalism, and Public Health.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004

Belich, James. *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Angloworld.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Bell, Duncan. *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860-1900*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.

Bhagavan, Manu, *India and the Quest for One World: The Peacemakers*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Bhana, Surendra, ed. *Essays on indentured Indians in Natal.* Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 1990.

Bivins, Roberta E. *Contagious Communities: Medicine, Migration, and the NHS in post-war Britain*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2015.

Blunt, Alison. *Domicile and Diaspora: Anglo-Indian women and the spatial politics of home*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005.

Blyth, Robert J. *The Empire of the Raj: India, Eastern Africa, and the Middle East, 1858- 1947*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

Bose, Sugata. *A Hundred Horizons: the Indian Ocean in the age of Global Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.

Brecher, Michael. *India and World Politics: Krishna Menon's view of the World.* New York: Praeger, 1968.

Breckenridge, Carol A., and Peter Van Der Veer, eds. *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Brown, Judith M. *Global South Asians: Introducing the Modern Diaspora*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Burton, Antoinette, ed. *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006.

Burton, Antoinette. *Africa in the Indian Imagination: Race and the Politics of Postcolonial Citation*. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2016.

Burton, Antoinette. *At the Heart of the Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in late-Victorian Britain*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

Campbell, Chloe. *Race and Empire: Eugenics in Colonial Kenya*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007.

Campbell, David. *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992.

Carter. Marina, and Khal Torabully. *Coolitude*. London: Anthem Press, 2002.

Chacko, Priya. *Indian Foreign Policy: The Politics of Postcolonial Identity from 1947 to 2004*. London: Routledge, 2012.

Chandrasekhar, Sripati. *Hungry People and Empty Lands: An Essay on Population Problems and International Tensions,* London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1954

Chatterji, Joya, and David Washbrook, eds. *Routledge Handbook of the South Asian Diaspora*. London and New York: Routledge, 2014.

Chopra, Rohit. *Technology and Nationalism in India: Cultural Negotiations from Colonialism to Cyberspace*. New York: Cambria Press, 2008.

Choudhry, Sujit, Madhav Khosla, and Pratap Bhanu Mehta, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of the Indian Constitution*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Cohn, Bernard S. *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

Connelly, Matthew. *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009.

Dabydeen, David, Maria del Pilar Kaladeen, and Tina K. Ramnarine, eds. *We Mark Your Memory: Writings from the Descendants of Indenture*. School of Advanced Study, London: School of Advanced Study University of London, 2018.

Dabydeen, David. *Coolie Odyssey*. London: Hansib, 1988

Datta-Ray, Deep K. *The Making of Indian Diplomacy: A Critique of Eurocentrism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Davis, Garry. *My Country is the World,* London: MacDonald, 1961.

Davis,Alexander E. *India and the Anglosphere: Race, Identity and Hierarchy in International Relations*. London and New York: Routledge, 2018.

Desai, Ashwin, and Goolam Vahed. *The South African Gandhi: Stretcher-Bearer of Empire*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015.

Desai, Rashmi H. *Indian Immigrants in Britain*. London: Oxford University Press, 1963.

Dev, Dharam Yash. *Our Countrymen Abroad: A Brief Survey of the Problems of Indians in Foreign Lands*. Allahabad: All India Congress Committee, 1940.

Du Bois, William E.B. *Dark Princess*. Minnesota: University of Mississippi Press, 1976.

Dufoix, Stéphane. *Diasporas*. Translated by William Rodarmor. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008

Ghosh, Amitav. *The Shadow Lines*. Ravi Dayal Publisher & Penguin Books, 2009

Gopal, Sarvepalli. *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography, Vol 2, 1947-56*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1979.

Gorman, Daniel. *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Gupta, Pamila, Isabel Hofmeyr, and Michael Naylor Pearson, eds*, Eyes across the Water: Navigating the Indian Ocean*, Pretoria : Unisa Press, 2010

Hancock, William Keith. *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs: Volume I, Problems of Nationality, 1918–1936*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1937.

Hansel, Mischa, Raphaëlle Khan, and Mélissa Levaillant, eds. *Theorizing Indian Foreign Policy*. London and New York: Routledge, 2017.

Hiro, Dilip. *Black British, White British*. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1971.

Hodges, Sarah. *Contraception, Colonialism and Commerce: Birth Control in South India, 1920-1940*. Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate Publishing Company. 2008.

Jalal, Ayesha. *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Jangam, Chinnaiah. *Dalits and the Making of Modern India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. 2017.

Jayal, Niraja Gopal. *Citizenship and its Discontents: An Indian History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013.

Johnston, Hugh. *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru: The Sikh Challenge to Canada's Colour Bar*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979.

Juergensmeyer, Mark. *Religion as Social Vision: The Movement Against Untouchability in 20th century Punjab*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.

Kanapathipillai, Valli. *Citizenship and Statelessness in Sri Lanka: The Case of the Tamil Estate Workers*. London: Anthem Press, 2009.

Keshavarz, Mahmoud. *The Design Politics of the Passport: Materiality, Immobility, and Dissent*. London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2019.

Khan, Yasmin. *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

Kondapi, Chenchal. *Indians Overseas*, 1838-1949. New Delhi: Indian Council of World Affairs, 1951.

Koshy, Susan, and Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan, eds. *Transnational South Asians: The Making of a Neo-diaspora.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Krishna, Sankaran. *Postcolonial Insecurities: India, Sri Lanka, and the question of nationhood.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

Kumar, Amitava. *Passport Photos*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

Kumar, Ashutosh. *Coolies of the Empire: Indentured Indians in the Sugar Colonies, 1830–1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Kumarasingham, Harshan, ed. *Constitution-making in Asia: Decolonisation and State-building in the Aftermath of the British Empire*. New York: Routledge, 2016.

Lal, Brij V. *Chalo Jahaji: On a journey through indenture in Fiji.* ANU E Press: 2012

Lal, Brij, Peter Reeves, and Rajesh Rai, eds. *The Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora.* Singapore: Didier Millet, 2006

Lal, Brij. *Intersections: History, Memory, Discipline.* ANU E Press, 2012

Lall, Marie-Carine. *India's Missed Opportunity*, Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2001.

Lawrance, Benjamin N., and Jacqueline Stevens, eds. *Citizenship in Question: Evidentiary Birthright and Statelessness*. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2017.

Lee, Christopher J., ed. *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and its Political Afterlives.* Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2010.

Lelyveld, Joseph. *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and his Struggle with India.* New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 2011.

Lloyd, Lorna. *Diplomacy with a Difference: the Commonwealth Office of High Commissioner, 1880-2006*. Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2007.

Lowe, Lisa. *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015.
Mahajan, Sneh. *Foreign Policy of Colonial India: 1900–1947*. Routledge, 2018.

Malone, David, C. Raja Mohan and Srinath Raghavan, eds. *The Oxford handbook of Indian foreign policy*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Malone, David. *Does the Elephant Dance?: Contemporary Indian Foreign Policy.* Oxford University Press, 2011.

Mamdani, Mahmood. *From Citizen to Refugee: Uganda Asians come to Britain*. Cape Town: Fahamu/Pambazuka, 2011.

Mawani, Renisa. *Across Oceans of Law: The Komagata Maru and Jurisdiction in the Time of Empire*. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2018.

Mayo, Katherine. *Mother India*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co, 1927.

McGarr, Paul M. *The Cold War in South Asia: Britain, the United States and the Indian Subcontinent, 1945-1965*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

McKenzie, Francine. *Redefining the Bonds of Commonwealth, 1939–1948: The Politics of Preference*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.

Meade, J. E., and A. S. Parkes, eds. *Biological Aspects of Social Problems*, Edinburgh and London: Oliver & Boyd, 1965.

Metcalf, Thomas R. *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860-1920*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

Mishra, Vijay. *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary*. Routledge. London and New York: Routledge, 2007.

Mongia, Radhika. *Indian Migration and Empire: A Colonial Genealogy of the Modern Stat*e. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018.

Mukherjee, Sumita. *Indian Suffragettes: Female Identities and Transnational Networks*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018

Mukherjee, Sumita. *Nationalism, Education and Migrant Identities: The England-Returned*. London: Routledge, 2010.

Munro, Doug, and Jack Corbett, eds. *Bearing Witness: Essays in Honour of Brij V. Lal*. ANU Press, 2017.

Muppidi, Himadeep. *The Politics of the Global*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

Neumann, Iver. *Diplomatic Sites: A Critical Enquiry*. New York : Columbia University Press, 2013.

Niranjana, Tejaswini. *Mobilizing India: Women, Music, and Migration between India and Trinidad*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006.

Oonk, Gijsbert, ed. *Global Indian Diasporas: Exploring Trajectories of Migration and Theory*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007.

Ostergaard-Nielsen, Eva, ed. *International Migration and Sending Countries: Perceptions, Policies and Transnational Relations*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Oyen, Meredith. *The Diplomacy of Migration: Transnational Lives and the Making of US-Chinese Relations in the Cold War*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015.

Pandey, Gyanendra. *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Pandian, M. S. S. *Brahmin and Non-Brahmin: Genealogies of the Tamil Political Present*. Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007.

Perry, Kennetta Hammond. *London is the Place for Me: Black Britons, Citizenship, and the Politics of Race*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Pham, Quỳnh N., and Robbie Shilliam, eds. *Meanings of Bandung: Postcolonial Orders and Decolonial Visions*. London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016.

Prasad, Srirupa. *Cultural Politics of Hygiene in India, 1890–1940: Contagions of Feeling*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Prashad, Vijay. *The Karma of Brown Folk*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

Ramnath, Maia. *Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.

Rao, P. Kodanda. *The Right Honourable V. S. Srinivasa Sastri: A Political Biography*. Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1963.

Rawat, Ramnarayan S., and K. Satyanarayana, eds. *Dalit Studies*. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2016.

Raza, Ali, Franziska Roy, and Benjamin Zachariah, eds. *The Internationalist Moment: South Asia, Worlds, and World Views 1917–39*. New Delhi: Sage, 2014.

Reiko, Karatani. *Defining British Citizenship: Empire, Commonwealth and Modern Britain*. London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003.

Rex, John, and Robert Moore, *Race, Community, and Conflict: A Study of Sparkbrook*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1967.

Reynolds, Henry. *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Rotter, Andrew J. *Comrades at Odds: The United States and India, 1947–1964*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000.

Roy, Anupama. *Mapping Citizenship in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010

Roy, Haimanti. *Partitioned Lives: Migrants, Refugees, Citizens in India and Pakistan, 1947–1965*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Roy, Srirupa. *Beyond Belief: India and the Politics of Postcolonial Nationalism*. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2007.

Sadiq, Kamal. *Paper Citizens: How Illegal Immigrants Acquire Citizenship in Developing Countries*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Salter, Mark B. *Rights of Passage: The Passport in International Relations*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003.

Sandhu, Kernial Singh. *Indians in Malaya: Some Aspects of their Immigration and Settlement (1786-1957)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969.

Seecharan, Clem. *Mother India's Shadow Over El Dorado: Indo-Guyanese Politics and Identity, 1890s-1930s*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2011.

Shani, Ornit, *How India Became Democratic: Citizenship and the Making of the Universal Franchise,* New Delhi: Penguin Random House, 2018.

Sharma, Mukul. *Caste and Nature: Dalits and Indian Environmental Policies*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Singh, Anita Inder. *The Limits of British Influence: South Asia and the Anglo-American Relationship 1947-56*. New York: St. Martin's, 1993.

Singh, Khushwant. *Collected Stories*. New Delhi: Penguin/Viking, 2007.

Singh, Khushwant. *Truth, Love and a Little Malice: An Autobiography*. New Delhi: Penguin Books in association with Ravi Dayal Publisher, 2002.

Sinha, Mrinalini. *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire*. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2006.

Slate, Nico. Colored Cosmopolitanism: *The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012.

Smith, Evan, and Marinella Marmo. *Race, Gender and the Body in British Immigration Control: Subject to Examination.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Solinger, Rickie, and Mie Nakachi, eds. *Reproductive States: Global Perspectives on the Invention and Implementation of Population Policy.* Oxford and New York : Oxford University Press, 2016.

Solomon, John. *A Subaltern History of the Indian Diaspora in Singapore: The Gradual Disappearance of Untouchability 1872-1965*. London and New York: Routledge, 2016.

Soske, Jon. *Internal Frontiers: African Nationalism and the Indian Diaspora in Twentieth-century South Africa.* Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2017.

Spencer, Ian R. G. *British Immigration Policy since 1939: The Making of Multi-Racial Britain*, New York: Routledge, 1997.

Steinmetz, George, ed. *Sociology and Empire: The Imperial Entanglements of a Discipline*. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2013.

Sundaram, Lanka. *Indians Overseas: A study in Economic-Sociology*. Madras: GA Natesan & Co., 1933.

Tambe, Ashwini, and Harald Fischer Tiné, eds. *The Limits of British Colonial Control in South Asia: Spaces of Disorder in the Indian Ocean Region.* London and New York: Routledge, 2008.

Thakur, Vineet. *Jan Smuts and the Indian Question*. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu Natal Press, 2017.

Thakur, Vineet. *Postscripts on Independence: Foreign Policy Ideas, Identity, and Institutions in India and South Africa*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Thompson, Andrew S., ed. *Writing Imperial Histories*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016.

Tinker, Hugh. *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830–1920*. London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1974

Tinker, Hugh. *Separate and Unequal: India and the Indians in the British Commonwealth*, 1920-1950. London: C. Hurst & Co, 1976.

Tinker, Hugh. *The Ordeal of Love: C. F. Andrews and India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979.

Torpey, John. *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship and the State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Tyler, Imogen. *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*. London: Zed Books, 2013.

Varadarajan, Latha. *The Domestic Abroad: Diasporas in International Relations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Visram, Rozina. *Asians in Britain: 400 years of History*. London: Pluto Press, 2002.

Visram, Rozina. *Ayahs, Lascars, and Princes: Indians in Britain, 1700-1947*. London: Pluto Press, 1986.

Wainwright, Martin A. *The Better Class' of Indians: Social Rank, Imperial Identity, and South Asians in Britain, 1858–1914*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008.

Walker, R. J. *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Ward, Stuart James. *Untied Kingdom: A World History of the End of Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020 (Forthcoming)

Williams, Patrick, and Laura Chrisman. eds. *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. London: Harvester Whaeatsheaf, 1993.

Wills, Clair. *Lovers and Strangers: An Immigrant History of Post-war Britain*. London: Penguin, 2017

Yengde, Suraj, and Anand Teltumbde, ed. *The Radical in Ambedkar: Critical Reflections*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2018.

Zamindar, Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali. *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.

Articles

Adamson, Fiona B., and Gerasimos Tsourapas. 'Migration diplomacy in world politics.' *International Studies Perspectives* (2018): 1-16.

Aiyar, Sana. 'Anticolonial Homelands across the Indian Ocean: The politics of the Indian diaspora in Kenya, ca. 1930–1950.' *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 4 (2011): 987-1013.

Amrith, Sunil S. 'Indians Overseas? Governing Tamil Migration to Malaya 1870–1941.' *Past and Present* 208, no. 1 (2010): 231-261.

Amrith, Sunil S. 'Tamil diasporas across the Bay of Bengal.' *The American Historical Review* 114, no. 3 (2009): 547-572.

Anderson, Clare. 'Convicts and coolies: rethinking indentured labour in the nineteenth century.' *Slavery and Abolition* 30, no. 1 (2009): 93-109.

Ankit, Rakesh. 'Britain and Kashmir, 1948:"The Arena of the UN".' *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 24, no. 2 (2013): 273-290.

Ansari, Sarah. 'Subjects or Citizens? India, Pakistan and the 1948 British Nationality Act.' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41, no. 2 (2013): 285-312.

Bashford, Alison. 'Nation, empire, globe: the spaces of population debate in the interwar years.' *Comparative studies in society and history* 49, no. 1 (2007): 170-201.

Bates, Crispin. 'Some Thoughts on the Representation and Misrepresentation of the Colonial South Asian Labour Diaspora.' *South Asian Studies* 33, no. 1 (2017): 7-22.

Bayly, Susan. 'Imagining 'Greater India': French and Indian visions of colonialism in the Indic mode.' *Modern Asian Studies* 38, no. 3 (2004): 703-744.

Bertram, G. C. L. 'Eugenics in the age of crowding.' *The Eugenics review* 50, no. 1 (1958): 41.

Bhagavan, Manu. 'A new hope: India, the United Nations and the making of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.' *Modern Asian Studies,* 44, no. 2 (2010): 311-347.

Brecher, Michael. 'India's Decision to Remain in the Commonwealth.' *Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 12, no. 1 (1974): 62-90.

Brubaker, Rogers. 'The 'diaspora' diaspora.' *Ethnic and racial studies* 28, no. 1 (2005): 1-19.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 'Legacies of Bandung: decolonisation and the politics of culture.' *Economic and Political Weekly,* Vol. 40, no.46 (2005): 4812-4818.

Chandrasekhar, S. 'Population pressure in India.' *Pacific Affairs* 16, no. 2 (1943): 166-184.

Chandrasekhar, S. 'The Emigration and Status of Indian in the British Empire.' *Social Forces* 24 (1945): 152.

Chatterji, Joya. 'South Asian histories of citizenship, 1946–1970.' *The Historical Journal* 55, no. 4 (2012): 1049-1071.

Cho, Lily. 'The turn to diaspora.' *Topia: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 17 (2007): 11-30.

Coffey, Donal K. "'The Right to Shoot Himself': Secession in the British Commonwealth of Nations.' *The Journal of Legal History* 39, no. 2 (2018): 117-139.

Craggs, Ruth. 'Hospitality in geopolitics and the making of Commonwealth international relations.' *Geoforum* 52 (2014): 90-100.

Craggs, Ruth. 'Postcolonial geographies, decolonization, and the performance of geopolitics at Commonwealth conferences.' *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 35, no. 1 (2014): 39-55.

Davis, Alexander E. 'Rethinking Australia's International Past: Identity, Foreign Policy and India in the Australian Colonial Imagination.' *Flinders Journal of History & Politics* 29 (2013).

Davis, Alexander E., and Vineet Thakur. 'Walking the Thin Line: India's Anti-Racist Diplomatic Practice in South Africa, Canada, and Australia, 1946–55.' *The International History Review* 38, no. 5 (2016): 880-899.

Dhupelia-Mesthrie, Uma. 'The place of India in South African history: academic scholarship, past, present and future.' *South African Historical Journal* 57, no. 1 (2007): 12-34.

Dickinson, Jen, and Adrian J. Bailey. '(Re) membering diaspora: Uneven geographies of Indian dual citizenship.' *Political Geography* 26, no. 7 (2007): 757-774.

Dickinson, Jen. 'Decolonising the diaspora: neo-colonial performances of Indian history in East Africa.' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 37, no. 4 (2012): 609-623.

Egreteau, Renaud. 'Burmese Indians in contemporary Burma: heritage, influence, and perceptions since 1988.' *Asian Ethnicity* 12, no. 1 (2011): 33-54.

Egreteau, Renaud. 'India's Vanishing "Burma Colonies". Repatriation, Urban Citizenship, and (De) Mobilization of Indian Returnees from Burma (Myanmar) since the 1960s.' *Moussons. Recherche en sciences humaines sur l'Asie du Sud-Est* 22 (2013): 11-34.

Gill, Talvinder. 'The Indian Workers' Association Coventry 1938–1990: political and social action.' *South Asian History and Culture*, 4, no. 4 (2013): 554-573.

Goffe, Tao Leigh. 'Intimate Occupations: The Afterlife of the "Coolie".' *Transforming Anthropology* 22, no. 1 (2014): 53-61.

Hansen, Randall. 'The politics of citizenship in 1940s Britain: the British Nationality Act.' *Twentieth Century British History* 10, no. 1 (1999): 67-95.

Ho, Elaine Lynn-Ee. "Claiming' the diaspora: Elite mobility, sending state strategies and the spatialities of citizenship.' *Progress in Human Geography* 35, no. 6 (2011): 757-772.

Hofmeyr, Isabel. 'The complicating sea: the Indian Ocean as method.' *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 32, no. 3 (2012): 584-590.

Hofmeyr, Isabel. 'Universalizing the Indian Ocean.' *PMLA* 125, no. 3 (2010): 721-729.

Immerwahr, Daniel. 'Caste or colony? Indianizing race in the United States.' *Modern Intellectual History* 4, no. 2 (2007): 275-301.

Inayatullah, Naeem, and David L. Blaney. 'Realizing sovereignty.' *Review of International Studies* 21, no. 1 (1995): 3-20.

Jackson, Isabella. 'The Raj on Nanjing Road: Sikh policemen in treaty-port Shanghai.' *Modern Asian Studies* 46, no. 6 (2012): 1672-1704.

Jayaram, Narayana. 'Heterogeneous Diaspora and Asymmetrical Orientations: India, Indians and the Indian Diaspora.' *Diaspora Studies* 1, no. 2 (2008): 1-21.

Kumarasingham, Harshan. 'The 'tropical dominions': The appeal of dominion status in the Decolonisation of India, Pakistan and Ceylon.' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 23 (2013): 223-245.

Kumarasingham, Harshan. 'The Indian Version of First among Equals–Executive Power during the First Decade of Independence.' *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 4 (2010): 709-751.

Kuracina, William F. 'Colonial India and external affairs: relating Indian nationalism to global politics.' *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 42, no. 6 (2007): 517-532.

Kuus, Merje. '"To Understand the Place": Geographical Knowledge and Diplomatic Practice.' *The Professional Geographer* 68, no. 4 (2016): 546-553.

Lal, Brij V. 'Indian indenture historiography: A note on problems, sources and methods.'*Pacific Studies* 6, no. 2 (1983): 33-50.

Lal, Brij V. 'Kunti's cry: Indentured women on Fiji plantations.' *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 22, no. 1 (1985): 55-71.

Lal, Brij V. 'The Odyssey of indenture: fragmentation and reconstitution in the Indian diaspora.' *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 5, no. 2 (1996): 167-188.

Lal, Brij V. 'Understanding the Indian indenture experience.' *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 21, no. s1 (1998): 215-237.

Legg, Stephen. 'An international anomaly? Sovereignty, the League of Nations and India's princely geographies.' *Journal of Historical Geography* 43, (2014): 96-110.

Liu, Lydia H. 'The Desire for the Sovereign and the Logic of Reciprocity in the Family of Nations.' *Diacritics* 29, no. 4 (1999): 150-177.

Lloyd, Lorna. 'Us and Them': The Changing Nature of Commonwealth Diplomacy, 1880-1973.' *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 39, no. 3 (2001): 9-30.

Lloyd, Lorna. "A Family Quarrel'. The Development of the Dispute over Indians in South Africa.' *Historical Journal* 34, no. 3 (1991): 703-725.

Lloyd, Lorna. "A most auspicious beginning': the 1946 United Nations General Assembly and the question of the treatment of Indians in South Africa.' *Review of International Studies* 16, no. 2 (1990): 131-153.

Mani, Bakirathi, and Latha Varadarajan. "'The Largest Gathering of the Global Indian Family": Neoliberalism, Nationalism, and Diaspora at Pravasi Bharatiya Divas.' *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 14, no. 1 (2005): 45-74.

Mann, Jatinder. 'The evolution of Commonwealth citizenship, 1945–1948 in Canada, Britain and Australia.' *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 50, no. 3 (2012): 293-313.

Mattausch, John. 'Gandhi's Prescription: Health and Hygiene in the Unfinished Struggle for Swaraj.' *South Asia Research* 34, no. 2 (2014): 155-169.

McCann, Gerard. 'From diaspora to third worldism and the United Nations: India and the politics of decolonizing Africa.' *Past & Present* 218, no. supplement 8 (2013): 258-280.

McGarr, Paul M. ''A Serious Menace to Security': British Intelligence, VK Krishna Menon and the Indian High Commission in London, 1947–52.' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 38, no. 3 (2010): 441-469.

McGarr, Paul M. "'India's Rasputin"?: VK Krishna Menon and Anglo–American Misperceptions of Indian Foreign Policymaking, 1947–1964.' *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 22, no. 2 (2011): 239-260.

Mesthrie, Uma. 'Reducing the Indian population to a "manageable compass": a study of the South African assisted emigration scheme of 1927.' *Natalia* 15 (1985): 36-56.

Mishra, Vijay. 'The diasporic imaginary: Theorizing the Indian diaspora.' *Textual Practice* 10, no. 3 (1996): 421-447.

Mohabir, Nalini, and Hyacinth Simpson. 'Resurgent (Rise Again) The Last Repatriation of Indo-Caribbean Indentured Labourers.' *Interventions* 8, no. 3 (2006): 487-505.

Mohabir, Nalini. 'Picturing an Afterlife of Indenture.' *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 21, no. 2 (53) (2017): 81-93.

Mohan, C. Raja. 'India as a Security Provider: Reconsidering the Raj Legacy.' *Institute of South Asian Studies Working Paper*. no . 146, 2012.

Mongia, Radhika Viyas. 'Race, nationality, mobility: A history of the passport.' *Public Culture* 11, no. 3 (1999): 527-555.

Moore, Robert. 'Forty Four Years of Debate: The Impact of Race, Community and Conflict.' *Sociological Research Online* 16, no. 3 (2011): 1-8.

Munshi, Sherally. 'Immigration, Imperialism, and the Legacies of Indian Exclusion.' *Yale Journal of Law & Humanities*. 28, no. 1 (2016).

Mycock, Andrew. 'British citizenship and the legacy of empires.' *Parliamentary Affairs* 63, no. 2 (2010): 339-355.

Nadkarni, Asha. '"World-Menace": National Reproduction and Public Health in Katherine Mayo's Mother India.' *American Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2008): 805-827.

Nair, Rahul. 'The construction of a 'population problem' in Colonial India 1919–1947.' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 39, no. 2 (2011): 227-247.

Neumann, Iver B. 'The body of the diplomat.' *European Journal of International Relations* 14, no. 4 (2008): 671-695.

Onley, James. 'The Raj reconsidered: British India's informal empire and spheres of influence in Asia and Africa.' *Asian Affairs* 40, no. 1 (2009): 44-62.

Outar, Lisa. 'Tropical longing: the quest for India in the early twentieth-century Caribbean.' *South Asian History and Culture* 2, no. 4 (2011): 464-481.

Paisley, Fiona. 'Sexuality, Nationalism, and "Race": Humanitarian Debate about Indian Indenture in Fiji, 1910–18.' *Labour History: A Journal of Labour and Social History* 113 (2017): 183-207.

Pande, Amba. 'India and its diaspora in Fiji.' *Diaspora Studies* 4, no. 2 (2011): 125-138.

Pandey, Gyanendra. 'Can a Muslim be an Indian?.' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 4 (1999): 608-629.

Pandian, M. S. S. 'One step outside modernity: Caste, identity politics and public sphere.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, no. 18 (2002): 1735-1741.

Parekh, Bhikhu. 'Some reflections on the Hindu Diaspora.' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 20, no. 4 (1994): 603-620.

Paul, Kathleen. '"British Subjects" and "British Stock": Labour's Postwar Imperialism.' *Journal of British Studies* 34, no. 2 (1995): 233-276.

Phadnis, Urmila. 'The Indo-Ceylon Pact and the" Stateless" Indians in Ceylon.' *Asian Survey,* 7, no. 4 (1967): 226-236.

Rana, Kishan. 'India's Diaspora Diplomacy.' *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 4, no. 3 (2009): 361-372.

Rao, P. Kodanda. 'Indians Overseas.' *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 233, no. 1 (1944): 200-207.

Rex, John. 'The concept of housing class and the sociology of race relations.' *Race & Class* 12, no. 3 (1971): 293-301.

Roy, Anjali Gera. 'Making and Unmaking of Strangers–The Komagata Maru Episode and the Alienation of Sikhs as Undesirable Persons.' *Sikh Formations* 12, no. 1 (2016): 67-86.

Roy, Anupama. 'Between encompassment and closure: the 'migrant' and the citizen in India.' *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 42, no. 2 (2008): 219-248.

Roy, Haimanti. 'Paper Rights: The Emergence of Documentary Identities in Post-Colonial India, 1950–67.' *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 39, no. 2 (2016): 329-349.

Rushdie, Salman. 'On Gunter Grass.' *Granta* 15: The Fall of Saigon, March 1, 1985

Shah, Hemant. 'Race, nation, and citizenship: Asian Indians and the idea of whiteness in the US press, 1906-1923.' *Howard Journal of Communication* 10, no. 4 (1999): 249-267.

Shastri, Amita. 'Estate Tamils, the Ceylon citizenship act of 1948 and Sri Lankan politics.' *Contemporary South Asia* 8, no. 1 (1999): 65-86.

Sherman, Taylor C., William Gould, and Sarah Ansari. 'From subjects to citizens: Society and the everyday state in India and Pakistan, 1947–1970.' *Modern Asian Studies* Special Issue, 45, no. 1 (2011).

Shimazu, Naoko. 'Diplomacy as theatre: staging the Bandung Conference of 1955.' *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no. 1 (2014): 225-252.

Singh, Anita Inder. 'Keeping India in the Commonwealth: British political and military aims, 1947-49.' *Journal of Contemporary History* 20, no. 3 (1985): 469-481.

Singha, Radhika. 'The Great War and a 'Proper' Passport for the Colony: Border-Crossing in British India, c. 1882–1922.' *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 50, no. 3 (2013): 289-315.

Slate, Nico. 'Translating race and caste.' *Journal of Historical Sociology* 24, no. 1 (2011): 62-79.

Steinberg, Stephen. 'Two children of empire: Michael Banton and John Rex.' *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38, no. 8 (2015): 1382-1388.

Stolte, Carolien, and Harald Fischer-Tiné. 'Imagining Asia in India: nationalism and internationalism (ca. 1905–1940).' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54, no. 1 (2012): 65-92.

Sturman, Rachel. 'Indian indentured labor and the history of international rights regimes.' *The American Historical Review* 119, no. 5 (2014): 1439-1465.

Sullivan, Kate. 'Exceptionalism in Indian Diplomacy: The Origins of India's Moral Leadership Aspirations.' *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 37, no. 4 (2014): 640-655.

Sundaram, Lanka. 'The International Status of India.' *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs* 9, no. 4 (1930): 452-466.

Sutton, Deborah. "Divided and Uncertain Loyalties' Partition, Indian Sovereignty and Contested Citizenship in East Africa, 1948–1955.' *Interventions* 9, no. 2 (2007): 276-288.

Sutton, Deborah. 'Imagined sovereignty and the Indian subject: Partition and politics beyond the nation, 1948–1960.' *Contemporary South Asia* 19, no. 4 (2011): 409-425.

Thakur, Vineet, and Alexander E. Davis. 'A Communal Affair over International Affairs: The Arrival of IR in Late Colonial India.' *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 40, no. 4 (2017): 689-705.

Thakur, Vineet. 'An Asian Drama: The Asian Relations Conference, 1947.' *The International History Review* (2018): 1-23.

Thakur, Vineet. 'Liberal, Liminal and Lost: India's first diplomats and the narrative of foreign policy.' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History,* 45, no. 2 (2017): 232-258.

Thakur, Vineet. 'The "hardy annual": A history of India's first UN resolution.' *India Review* 16, no. 4 (2017): 401-429.

Thakur, Vineet. 'The colonial origins of Indian foreign policymaking.' *Economic and Political Weekly* 49, no. 32 (2014): 58-64.

Tölölyan, Khachig. 'Rethinking diaspora (s): Stateless power in the transnational moment.' *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 5, no. 1 (1996): 3-36.

Tölölyan, Khachig. 'The nation-state and its others: in lieu of a preface.' *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no. 1 (1991): 3-7.

Turnell, Sean, 'Chettiars in Burma,' *Working Paper no. 512,* Research Papers from Macquarie University.

Vahed, Goolam. "Nehru is just another coolie': India and South Africa at the United Nations, 1946-1955,' *Alternation*, Special Edition, no. 15 (2015): 55-85

Vahed, Goolam. 'The Protector, Plantocracy, and Indentured Labour in Natal, 1860–1911.' *Pacific Historical Review* 87, no. 1 (2018): 101-127.

Vivekanandan, Jayashree. 'Indianisation or indigenisation? Greater India and the politics of cultural diffusionism.' *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 56, no. 1 (2018): 1-21.

Vukov, Tamara. 'Imagining communities through immigration policies: Governmental regulation, media spectacles and the affective politics of national borders.' *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 6, no. 3 (2003): 335-353.

Waterhouse, A. H., and Diana H. Brabban. 'Inquiry into the Fertility of Immigrants.' *International Migration Digest* 1, no. 2 (1964): 152-166.

Weiner, Myron. 'Rejected peoples and unwanted migrants in South Asia.' *Economic and Political Weekly* (1993): 1737-1746.

Yarwood, A. T. 'The Overseas Indians as a Problem in Indian and Imperial Politics at the End of World War One.' *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 14, no. 2 (1968): 204-218.

Conference Papers

Davis, Alexander E., 'An Archival Turn for International Relations: Interrogating India's Diplomatic History from the Postcolonial Archive.' Paper presented at ISA Global South Caucus, Singapore, January 2015

Heere, Cees. 'Among the Nations of the Empire: Migration Diplomacy and the Making of Indian Statehood, 1900-1923,' Paper presented at the Britain and the World conference, University of Exeter, 2018.

Mistry, Heena. 'Settler Citizenship and Indigeneity: Indians Overseas and the Claim to British Imperial Citizenship, 1918-1940,' Paper presented at the Global Conference on Indian Diaspora, The Hague, 2017

Dissertations

Elangovan, Arvind. 'A Constitutional Imagination of India: Sir Benegal Narsing Rau amidst the Retreat of liberal Idealism (1910–1950).' PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2012.

Laut, Julie. 'India at the United Nations: A Postcolonial Nation-State on the Global Stage, 1945-1966.' PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2016.

Mehta, Purvi. 'Recasting Caste: Histories of Dalit Transnationalism and the Internationalization of Caste Discrimination.' PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2013

Ramnath, Kalyani. 'Boats in a Storm: Law, Politics, and Jurisdiction in Postwar South Asia.' PhD diss., Princeton University, 2018.